

Reincarnation With an Omniscient Grimoire

Arc 1 – The Stolen grimoire

Prologue

“So, you are ... from another dimension?” The police officer, she was female, asked with a rather doubting expression.

“That’s what I was telling you about two hours ago, yes.”

It was so damn frustrating talking with this woman. But what should I expect? If I was in her place I also would be unbelieving.

“You’re not the only one whose grimoire has been stolen, but you’re the first one claiming to be summoned from another world.”

I sighed at those first words.

“Please don’t remind me of that again...”

“Okay, so you could just finally start describing what exactly happened to you, or we get you an exorcist, or something, before you totally start spazzing out.”

“I’m not ...”

“Look, it’s in the middle of summer, so it would be only natural for you to get sunstroke and imagining weird things, so pleeeeee just tell me, who stole you the book and it’ll get a lot easier for both of us.” she exclaimed angrily.

“Okay, just forget the first part already.”

“Well then, explain. In every. Single. Detail.”

Chapter 1 – The not so glorious start to my adventure

The story began when little 14-year-old Nathan, let's call him "Me" for short, just wanted to get some sleep after finishing the third thirteenth part of Final Fantasy (man I hated it) and then woke up somewhere else. I'm not even sure, whether I died, maybe of exhaustion, or whether I was summoned magically, but I somehow was here in this fantasy world.

And also, I was naked.

Apparently, whoever thought it was a good idea to teleport me into this fantasy world also thought it was a good idea to bring me here with my best piece of clothing which was my birthday suit. (I don't have any abs, sorry girls.)

I didn't realize it at first (it was friggin' hot so I was kind of glad for a moment) since I was sleeping and rather irritated. I was quite sure I fell asleep at home, in my bed, and not outside under a tree on a vast field.

After running around the tree, which felt really weird without any clothing, I realized that I wasn't alone. There weren't any people nearby, luckily, but beneath the tree, just one step next to the spot where I woke up was a book. It had a symbol on its cover that reminded me of the one used in the opening of NGE. It had some circles and lines and I think it was something religious.

At least in our world.

Clueless of what to do, of course I reached my hand out for it. The moment I touched it, a beam of light went through my body, engulfing it completely, and then going back inside the book, that was flying in front of me. I could see how the book's pages were turning and I was able to catch small glimpses of its contents. At first unable to read them, I was able to understand some words and then phrases bit by bit as if someone was pouring this language, unknown to me, in my head.

After this happened words popped up inside my head. It was not like I was seeing a text box in front of my face, but more like those words just popped into my mind.

[Language transfer complete]

[Bond established]

"I am thou, thou art I, I know that shit already, what do you want?"

[Please register new owner]

The book turned to its first page, and apparently it wanted me to write my name in it.

"But I don't have a pen..."

[No pen required.]

[Use your thoughts to choose a name.]

So, this is a talking book, or what...

[This is not a book.]

"And now you're readin' my mind?!"

[This is a grimoire.]

"A grimoire?" I heard of those before. They often appeared in certain RPG Games and apparently, they also exist in real-life, but this is the first time I actually saw one. I think it's used to cast spells or something like that.

[Please register new owner]

Again, those words appeared in my head. I was considering using one of my online usernames just for fun, but walking around with them for the entire rest of my life would be a total cringe. So I simply decided to choose my real name, Nathan.

[Register >>Nathan<< as owner?]

“Aye.” I exclaimed.

[Registered >>Nathan<< as owner]

[Confirm species >>Human<<?]

I scanned my body for anything unusual like furry ears or a tail, but apart from the one I already owned before, there wasn't any.

“I'm human, I guess...”

[Species >>Human<< confirmed]

[Confirm profession >>Mage<<?]

“Geez, I'm annoyed, couldn't you simply give me some clothes and stop babbling, so I could start my adventure? Ugh, are there any other professions?”

[You don't have any choice.]

My angry expression faltered. It was quite irritating to be given a choice without any options.

“Then just confirm already.”

[Profession >>Mage<< confirmed]

The grimoire turned its pages again and this time it showed me my stats which looked quite similar to the ones you usually see in video games. I decided to sit in front of the tree, hugging my knees. The book ... grimoire was still floating in front of me, so I didn't have to hold it in my hands.

[Confirm?]

I quickly skipped through my stats and checked everything.

[Name:] >>Nathan<<

[Species:] >>Human<<

[Profession:] >>Mage<<

The other stats all showed some basic things like Level, MP, HP, and a section with useable skills, which of course was completely empty, because I was still Level 1.

On the other hand, I'm a mage, so what is this bullshit?

“Turn ... page?” I asked hoping it would work, and it did.

The next two pages displayed my items, armor, and weapons, which of course were still non-existent.

[Confirm?]

This pesky son of a book asked again.

“Yes, please.” I asked with the cutest voice you could possibly imagine. Again, this beam of light went inside of me but this time it actually gave me some clothes.

Well, at least that's something.

[New >>Items<< added to inventory]

[Added >>White Shirt<<]

[Added >>Black Shorts<<]

[Added >>Leather Boots<<]

[Added >>Red Scarf<<]

“Why the heck did you give me a scarf? It’s in the middle of summer. But well, I actually like how it looks.”

[Check >>Items<<?]

“Sure, why not...”

I quickly looked at their descriptions and stats. The clothes were quite comfy although it was a weird mix. Perhaps they were chosen randomly and I just happened to get this interesting combo consisting of shorts and a scarf? Also, my Shirt hat long sleeves so it might get a bit hot. That’s why I decided to roll them up. Also, I took off my boots. They were quite uncomfortable to be honest so I told the grimoire to take them off and they appeared in my inventory.

“That’s better.” I thought, feeling the grass under my feet. Then I finally took time to take a look at my surroundings. On the field weren’t any other trees. The only thing I could see was a small river in the distance and a bridge leading across. I figured there had to be a path, although I wasn’t able to see it, because the sun shone too bright, and the bridge was too far away, and too small to really make out any detail.

Not having any other option, I decided to run over to the river and to cross the bridge.

I got slower after a while, and when I nearly came to a stop, I finally spotted a path which I chose to follow, although it would be faster going the direct way of course. The path was curved on rare occasions mainly because of steep hills or trees preventing it to make a straight line.

Also, it looked better this way.

It took a little while until I could see the bridge built of stone above a small river. It would have taken maybe two steps to cross it.

A small gust of wind let my hair fly carrying the faint sound of church bells in the distance to me. I counted.

I counted twelve.

“Is it noon yet?”

Wait a moment. I’m hearing church bells, doesn’t that mean, there’s a city nearby?

[The next city is >>Ataraxia<<]

Shiver’s went down my spine. I glanced down at the grimoire in my hands.

I didn’t ask you for your opinion, okay?

Believe it or not, this thing actually got me scared. Having those thoughts popping into my mind felt like hypnosis.

Maybe I am only a game character controlled by a player. At least this would explain why this all reminds me of another RPG.

Then I heard ... *Hooves?*

I looked up and saw a carriage in the distance coming my direction. I crossed the bridge and then took a step to the side to avoid being run over. It wasn’t necessary though, as the carriage came to a halt next to me. The curtains of the window next to me opened and revealed a beautiful young lady.

“You seem ... lost. May I help you?” She spoke with a charming voice. Too charming for her to be fully honest about just wanting to help me. She sounded like one of those manipulative characters you sometimes see in various TV shows. Her eyes were sky blue, but were surrounded by black makeup and her lips had a pink tone, but it was hard to make out any more details since it was dark inside of the carriage.

“Umm ... Is this the way leading to ... Ataraxia?” I asked with a shivering voice. She was beautiful, but this situation seemed scary at the same time.

[This is the path leading to >>Ataraxia<<]

Shut up, you stupid book! Are you a living search engine?!

[I contain all knowledge of this world.]

Well, that's something ...

“Yes, I just came from the city. Follow this path for a few minutes and you reach the city gate.”

Then something changed about her gaze. I wasn't able to pinpoint it though since it was still dark inside the carriage but then she leaned outside the window.

“Boy, tell me ... Where did you find this book?”

Now that I saw her face completely another message popped up.

[Name: >>Ebony Dark'ness Dementia<< | Race: >> Succubus<< | Profession: >>Mage<<]

“What is a Succubus...?” I muttered to myself, quietly.

And I was soon to find out.

[>>Succubi<< are one of the many races in this world.]

She opened the door.

[They are known for seducing the other sex and in the process often killing them.]

I took a step back.

[Although the deaths through >>Succubi<< have faced a sudden decline due to them being integrated into the society of the other races.]

She took the hand I held the book in.

[They bite their victims to hypnotize them and make them their slaves.]

She bit.

[There are some differences in contrast to Vamp...]

She took the book and let my body drop onto the earth.

Chapter 2 – Interrogated by a police officer

“Was that the last thing you remember, before you woke up?” The police officer asked. I wished at that moment that I could at least see her stats.

“Exactly.”

You probably wonder, what happened afterwards. After her bite, I obviously lost consciousness. She sucked most of my blood out of me, probably intending to kill me. I wasn't quite sure how I survived. Apparently, a merchant found my pale near-dead body on his way to the city. I first got into something like a hospital where they actually gave me blood transfusions. A few hours later, it was evening already, I woke up and was welcomed by the police officer. She didn't waste any time and directly asked me about the attack.

“How do you know I was attacked?” I asked.

“It's obvious. Those bite marks are probably glowing in the dark.” She pointed at my arm. “Are those a vampire's or maybe ... a succubus?”

“It was a succubus ... yeah.” I still haven't fully recovered so my brain wasn't working as it has before.

“Well I guess you simply had bad luck. Succubi attacks are quite rare nowadays, but you were outside of the town with no witnesses around. Was there anything suspicious about her?”

“How did you know it's a she? Were there more attacks recently?”

“Oh, you really know nothing ... Succubi are always women. The male ones are called Incubus.”

“Oh...” I blushed.

“Now I wonder ... how where you even able to distinguish?”

My brain sent alerts as I was not sure how to explain it. Are grimoire's even everyday things or was I special because I am from another world?

“Well she was ... kinda hot ... and, um she sucked my blood. That is what Succubi do, am I right?”

“I guess ...” She looked through the window. It was already getting dark and thus she proposed: “Are you able to walk again? It's getting dark outside and, well, the food here isn't the best. What about going to the police office? At least we have cookies and coffee.”

And that's how I ended up here. I thought she might like me, until I told her about being from another world, which of course she wouldn't believe.

The office was only a two-minute walk from the hospital. I couldn't see much of the city, but at least I could tell it was big.

After handing me a cup, she continued her interrogation. It felt as if being in this building gave her strength. At least I thought so. Her presence was ... quite intimidating.

“So, tell me, what did she look like?”

I tried to recall every single detail which wasn't easy since I only saw her a brief second. Actually, I wasn't very helpful. I described her as a “marvelous beauty” and “her lips were shining even though there was no light they could reflect” and, yeah, you could totally tell I still had a boner after this meeting although my blood pressure has been way under the norm for half the day.

“That wasn't very helpful.”

Just as I said ...

“Is there anything else you’d like to tell me? If not, we should just stop for today.”

“Actually ... there is. She stole my grimoire.” I finally decided to tell it. Who knew what power it had, even more, if it was maybe the only in the entire world?

“Your what?!” She stood up, her hands pressed against the table and I was able to see her veins.

“My Grim...”

“Why didn’t you say so before?! That’ll make it a lot easier to track down our enemy!”

“Your ... enemy?” She seemed kind of ... overexcited, talking that loudly.

“Actually” She calmed down, “I’m probably not allowed to say. But your grimoire is not the only one, that has been stolen.”

So, they do exist.

“Lately there have been several thefts around the city, each involving a grimoire being stolen. The thieves never got caught. And if, the witnesses were always found dead.”

“And how did I actually help?” I asked reluctantly.

“You know, there aren’t lots of Succubi living in this city.”

In that exact moment, a door opened and in came a young adult, maybe around the age of 20 came in. His hair was bright and small signs of a beard were visible. The most distinctive feature though, was the shape of his ears. They were pointy, yet small.

An elf maybe?

“Ebony Dark’ness Dementia wishes to see you, Shelly.”

“It’s her!” We both shouted at the same time, to which Shelly, apparently that was her name, gave me an irritated glance.

“Tell her to wait a minute, Trevor.”

“Of course.” Trevor left and closed the door.

“This is my now prime suspect. You have to hide!”

“But...”

“I’ll explain to you later, she might recognize you. Go, hide yourself in the kitchen, I’ll keep her away from there.”

The kitchen was a small room adjacent to the lounge, where we were sitting until now. I hurried into the next room, and closed the door behind me. I peeked through the keyhole. I could hear and see Shelly opening the door and a few seconds later I heard high heels walking into the lounge.

“I’m sorry for stealing your time this late.”

“No, it’s okay. As long as you are here to report something?”

“Not exactly. I’m here because of the recent ... thefts.”

“You mean the grimoires?”

“Exactly. I’m quite concerned regarding my own collection. Some of them are mine, but mostly they were collected by all my ancestors. You could possibly backtrack them to the beginning of our era.”

“Okay, so how can I help you?”

“I need some information. It would be easier to put up some ... security measures, if I would at least know, what kind of ... threat I’m facing.”

If you tell her how far your investigations have gone, you would be pretty dumb, Shelly.

“Sorry, that’s classified.”

“Is it?”

“Yes, I’m not allowed to tell you without facing the threat of being punished, if this comes out.”

“But you are ... the police officer.”

“And I am not the highest instance being responsible for catching and especially not for judging criminals.” Her voice got unexpectedly fierce. It was an interesting change to her calm self, especially speaking in front of this royal-looking person. “That’s all I have to say.”

I could hear footsteps and then a closing door. I looked through the keyhole again, and opened the door, after making sure, she was gone.

“Aster, go after her.” I could hear Shelly say.

“As you wish.” A man suddenly appeared and vanished after saying those words.

“She was the one attacking me.”

“She was here to sound us out.” Shelly said.

“That’s what I also figured.”

“You don’t seem that dumb. Just a bit ... unworldly.”

Well that’s because ... nah, forget it.

“You also started talking ... like her.” I noticed. “It’s freaking me ... out”

“You mean with those weird breaks in her sentences? Yeah, I also noticed that. I think she’s trying to build up tension. It’s weird.”

After this little conversation, there was an awkward kind of silence.

“I think it’s the best for you, if you sleep here tonight.” With that she broke through it.

“That’s good, because I don’t have anywhere to stay!”

“Until this case is solved you have to stay close by my side.”

“What?”

“You don’t have any knowledge of how to use magic, have you?” She gave me a gloomy expression.

“Magic?” The grimoire had set my profession as Mage, but without it I doubted I was able to use any of it.

“So, you don’t even know what Magic is?”

“I know what magic is! I just can’t use it ...”

“So, you really are from another world, are you...” She muttered to herself. “But that’s just one more reason to have you under custody. Hear me up, assuming Miss Dementia is the culprit, she will probably come to kill you, if she realizes, she hasn’t killed you, since you are our only living witness. And if you aren’t even able to use magic, you’ll die in no time.”

With a stern look she her face came closer to mine, as she said this.

“But for now, we should probably rest.” She said, stretching herself. “This day was tiring and I can’t wait to catch some sleep. I’m also going to sleep at the office. I will protect you, no matter what.”

“Thank you, Shelly.”

“That’s my job. Now come with me. I show you a place to rest.”

Chapter 3 – Tea Party with Princess Abc

The next day a somewhat unusual guest showed up.

I slept in a room next to the lounge, where Shelly was sleeping guarding me. After I woke up, I took on my clothes. I remembered the grimoire having a function to do this easily so I'm looking forward to getting it back.

I went to the lounge hearing Shelly's voice and that of another young woman. She sounded like she was my age, maybe a bit older, but it was also quite hysterical. I got out of my room.

"No, I refuse to stay back and look at you doing your work. It may be your job, but it is also my honor that has to be defended." that second voice said.

I quietly closed the door and leaned against it, watching the conversation.

"Of course, Princess. This is not to debate, but your parents would kill me, if they find out about you going on a mission, and risking to get hurt."

"They would kill us both if they found out, and that is exactly why they won't! Trust me, I am in Year 3 of Ataraxia and I have been trained in hand-to-hand combat since my body was able to hold itself. If there is something I am capable of, then it is surviving."

Shelly was staring blankly at the desk she was leaning onto.

"I'll allow you to join us, if you take full responsibility for yourself." she finally said, her voice weakened.

"That is beyond all question, of course."

Shelly looked up, and she met my eyes. I was still leaning against the door, smiling.

"Nathan." she said. The voice turned around.

"Princess, this is Nathan. His grimoire was also stolen. He will be joining us in our mission."

"Will I?"

"Of course. After all, I have to protect you, it could be dangerous to leave you here, alone."

The Princess was looking into my eyes.

"My name is Princess Aurelia Béatrice van Carelis. The thieves also stole one of our families grimoires. I suppose you will be of great help, during our mission." she had a stern expression as she spoke.

Sh- Should I bow?

I wasn't quite sure, how to handle this situation, meeting a princess goes beyond extraordinary, so I simply decided to just go with the flow.

"O- Of course!" I said, bowing.

"There is no need to bow." I heard the smile in her voice.

I lifted my body and looked at her face. She was indeed smiling.

"Two things though: First of all, this is an informal meeting. You two are the only ones to know, I am here. Second, I am not very fond of people humiliating themselves, simply because I was born into this family, and society told them to do so."

"Ah." I understood.

"So, what is this mission about?" I suddenly realized, I had absolutely no idea, what we were going to do.

"Finding the stolen grimoires of course. Well that's at least, until Aster comes back. I ordered him to follow Miss Dementia and find some more clues. He should be here any minute. In the mean-time ... Princess Carelis, would you like a cup of tea?"

Princess Aurelia Béatrice van Carelis ... What a peculiar name, even for a Princess. Something's been bothering me about this name ... Could it be?

"Princess ... a ... b ... c?"

"Kya!" I heard this weird sound from the Princesses direction. She appeared to have spilled a bit of tea over her brown cloak, that was hiding the rest of her body. Then she tilted her head 180° as if she were a shaft production and glared at me.

"What?"

"Do not. Say it. Again!" She got louder with each sentence and with each passing second, I felt like her face was getting closer to mine.

"What? Princess Abc?" I asked, being really confused, but I guess she was thinking I did it on purpose.

Her face went white in an instant, and she looked genuinely creepy with her tilting her head, while still maintaining a perfect posture with the tea cup and saucer in both her hands.

Within a split second the tea landed next to me, and it only did, because I was somehow able to jump to the side. That's all I would have needed! Going to hospital again because of burns!

"Shellyly! I spilled my tea, could you please hand me the tea pot?" she was asking with a cutesy voice like nothing had happened.

"So that's how it is, huh? Princess Abc?" Needless to say, I was doing it on purpose.

"I guess you have heard I have been taking combat practices my whole life?" Well, there's the tilt again. "I guess you are reeeaally keen on seeing it first-handed, yeeees?"

"No thanks, I quit."

"Gooooood!" She tilted her head like another 180° and turned back to her tea cup standing on the table, steaming.

She was still wearing that cloak, covering her entire back. She really looked like a mage.

I slowly moved towards the table and took a seat. She was blowing away the steam rising from her cup. From where I sat, I was able to see blonde-brunette locks hanging out of the cloak. The color of her eyes I wasn't able to determine, but they seemed to be a rather dark since I wasn't able to make it out due to the shadow cast by the hood.

On my other side was Shelly. Her hair was rather dark. Actually, it wasn't that far from black. Her sharp eyes were emerald-colored. It really made her look like a witch. And although her firm look was like that of an adult, her face appeared quite child-like. She was a bit taller than me, but that didn't matter, as I was still growing.

Nonetheless, the people I was sitting together with were astonishingly beautiful.

Or maybe the girls I know from school were ugly.

"So~, what are we gonna do now?" I finally asked.

"We'll wait for Aster." was the answer Shelly gave.

"Was that the guy from yesterday, that was there for barely a split-second? Who is he?"

"Yes, that was him. He is one of my ... subordinates."

"You're starting to be weird again."

"Huh? Oh!" she blushed. "Yeah, I'm sorry about that. Well you could call him a ninja assassin spy, or something like that?"

"A ninja assassin spy. That is ridiculous." Princess Abc answered.

"Sorry, I wasn't sure how to put it, so **he'll** understand."

"Okay, that was low-key insulting?"

“But yeah, he’s a spy and I call him a ninja assassin, because he sometimes doesn’t exist, though most of the time he’ll be there, when you need him. Just like yesterday, when I ordered him to follow Miss Dementia.”

“Yeah, that actually was really cool.”

“I had no idea, he actually was there, so it would have been really embarrassing if I would’ve talked to myself.”

“Tschoo!”

I nearly threw over my chair. He really is there, without you noticing him, because he might’ve actually sat there the whole time.

“It’s not really nice to talk about people who are absent from the conversation.” Aster said.

“Oh hey, you’re back!”

“Mission failed.” he said, giving us a thumbs-up. He had a Kakashi-esque vibe, only that he wasn’t covering his mouth, but his eyes instead, which wasn’t very comforting, since I wasn’t able to look into his eyes at all. How could he even see like this? You got it: Magic. He was also wearing a black scarf. (They are cool, aren’t they?) I was only able to see the upper half of his body, but his outfit looked like that of a certain tribe, out of a certain video game series. I’m really gay for him right now, excuse me.

His white hair was held back by the blindfold, hiding his eyes.

“I think they noticed me. I hid near their mansion, and when they came out I followed them. And then they disappeared.”

“How?” Shelly asked.

“I don’t’ really know. They were heading towards the gate, then they turned around a corner, and when I followed, they weren’t there. Of course, I tried to find them, but they were nowhere to be found.”

Well you couldn’t expect someone with a blindfold to search for ... something.

“But we know they were heading towards the gate.” Princess Abc exclaimed.

“Also, when I was attacked, they were leaving the city.” I realized.

“But that won’t help us at all. We don’t have any idea, were they could have been going, or why.”

“But there was also one thing I noticed.” Aster said. “I tried to use my gaze, to find them, and I was able to sense them somewhere. I was able to find them undergrounds somewhere in the outskirts of the city. I wasn’t able to pinpoint their position, since it was too far away, and I thought it could be dangerous to search for them alone. They might have a hideout somewhere outside.”

“It’s okay. No, actually it’s really good this way. Aster, we have a team, of four people. Which is you and me, Nathan, and the princess.”

Aster frowned. “The princess?”

“It is alright. I will be responsible for anything, that might happen.”

“Will I be of any use? I don’t have any weapons.”

“I’ll give you a wand later. Maybe, you’ll somehow be able to make use of it. I promised I would protect you, though.”

“Wands?”

“Haven’t you even heard of wands?!”

Yep, I’m driving her insane.

“I know what they are, they just seem kinda ...” *Clichéd?*

“You should also grab a knife. If you want to be useful ...”

If we’re going to fight I will just be a nuisance. But hey, at least I think, I have good chances to survive.

“Are we ready to start this mission?”

“Wait, what even is the plan?” I really was concerned. They had no idea, where our enemies where, and they planned to just magically stumble upon their secret lair or what? Does it even exist?

“To find them, of course.”

“Sure.”

I wasn’t hiding my enthusiasm.

It simply did not exist.

Chapter 4 – Aster has a gaze

The space in front of the gate was spacious, yet humanoid lifeforms were nowhere to be found. I say humanoid lifeforms, since humans aren't the only beings living in this city.

The Academy City of Ataraxia.

The police office was near the city center, so it took a few minutes to reach the gates. But within those minutes I learned more than my brain was able to handle.

While walking through the streets, I realized most of the town's population seemed to be rather young. This makes sense, since it is an Academy City. Ataraxia Academy is the biggest Magic Academy within the continent of Lectus Dei, Aurelia explained. (*At least now I know the name of the Kingdom.*) Thus, many young students gather in this city and the citizens average age is quite low. When I asked about the student's parents, Princess Abc replied, that the school has their own dorm rooms.

Except for Humans there also were Incubi and Succubi, of course, some Elves, although they preferred to not show themselves to "lower" species (Shelly put that word into quotation marks as she said it) along with beasts. Beasts sound way more dangerous than they are. They simply are a humanoid species with animal characteristics. As we walked through the streets, I saw many of those and though I knew those from playing video games, they were weird to look at in 3D.

The city had a medieval touch to it, but elements of industrialization were also prevalent, like for example the use of cars, or electricity, though probably not working the same way as in our world.

We reached the main gate, which was in the west. The Academy laid in the east, and could be seen from the other site of the town. It was by far the biggest building around, not only in height, but it also covered a vast terrain.

The city gate was of course guarded by soldiers wearing rather heavy armor. Of course, they also used weapons, but instead of the typical halberds one of them held a magic wand that Shelly mentioned before and the other one was using brass knuckles.

"Ah, it's you Chief." Mister Magic Wand said and hid said weapon under his robe. Actually, I would have liked to see this thing in action.

"Yes. We're going out on a mission."

"Be careful."

Now that everything was said, and we left the city, I asked one question: "One of them was wearing brass knuckles. Is he able to use magic with them?"

"Are you stupid? How do you know nothing about anything?" Princess Abc exclaimed. Well, I don't blame her. She still doesn't know I'm from another world. Shelly on the other hand still is not really convinced about it, but she somehow accepts it. Or she thinks I'm just hiding my own stupidity under some weird sort of lie.

"Yes, though wands are rather common among magicians, there has been a growing trend of using different items. Actually, you don't need any weapon at all, but it easier to channel your magic if you have an object you can focus on. Spellcasting without any kind of host is high class use of magic. Also, it allows you special kinds of attacks. For example, one of that mans signature moves involves focusing electric energy in his knuckles to hit an opponent with an electric blow."

As she explained this, we walked over a path leading away from the city. The city was hiding behind a mountain range, which is the reason I wasn't able to see it while crossing the bridge. The path led to a small sort of canyon, that apparently was man-made. In the distance, there was the field I woke up in, and of course there also was - "The Bridge." I said.

"Yes, that's also where you were found." Shelly reminded.

"They were leaving the city, since they also came the same way, we are right now. It was around noon, I remember hearing the bells in the distance." I said.

"I noticed the theft of our grimoire yesterday in the evening, after I came back from school. It was the last day, you have to know. Since I wasn't at home most of the day, they might have also stolen it somewhere before noon."

"By the way, why are we talking in plural form about the culprit the whole time?" I asked.

"There was a high probability, that Miss Dementia's younger brother also was involved."

"And when I was ordered to follow them, she was going with her brother, Raven Way, an Incubus." Aster added.

After few minutes, we reached the bridge.

"So...what are we gonna do now?" I asked, standing on the exact spot, where I was robbed.

"Now you'll see something special." Shelly claimed.

"I am special." Aster interrupted her.

"I told you about using weapons to focus your magic and about sorcerers that are able to use magic without a host. Aster indeed is special."

"You know, I cover my eyes for a certain reason. It's because of my magic. It's there to suppress it." He turned my direction. He took off the blind and revealed two sky blue irises adorning his otherwise squinted eyes. It was a color, that couldn't possibly exist in my shitty world.

"The reason my eyes are like this, because those aren't my real eyes. I lost them as a child and they were replaced with marbles having a certain spell carved into them that allows me to have a 360° vision within a range of up to 5 kilometers through every sort of material that normally would prevent you from seeing any further."

Indeed, I was able to see the small carvings in his eyes, although I wasn't able to read what it said. After a few seconds, he put his blind he was holding in his hand the whole time on again.

"Follow me."

"Why do you have this blindfold, if you have this amazing power?"

"I wasn't supposed to have such an incredible power. But my father, the one who crafted my eyes, did a mistake with those carvings. I was supposed to be a normal person with normal eyes, nothing extraordinary at all. But the eyes use an enormous amount of my mana, that's why my father also crafted this blindfold to suppress the magic used by my eyes to just be enough to see like a normal living person."

So mana does exist? I realized I knew way too little about this world. But I was excited to see, what I might find next.

We followed the path. I knew this area up to a certain point. I found what had to be the tree I woke up under, and we went even further. We left the path at a certain point, and instead followed Aster to what seemed to be a straight wall. It might have been part of the mountain range. The grass was high and it still was as warm as yesterday. Sadly, I wasn't able to store my clothing in my grimoire. Shelly gave me a pair of shoes, since my first pair was still in my

inventory, that I had no access to. Having to walk this barefoot would definitely not have been an option for me.

I wonder how high the stats of those shoes are.

The closer we came towards this wall, the more I realized something odd. There were small borders forming what could be an entrance to a cave.

“Is this a cave?” I finally asked.

Aster took off his blinds for barely a second. “So, it really was a cave.”

“Huh? You weren’t even sure of that?”

“Seeing everything within a distance of 5km within a 360° angle is not an easy job, kid.” He tied his blind and then said: “This is the entrance to a cave. It goes around 20 meters underground. The wall at this point has a thickness of 3 meters. They probably use some spell to open it.”

“Take a step to the side.” Princess Abc bluntly said, and Aster obeyed. The Princess took a few steps forward, and then unveiled her arms that until now were hidden under her cloak. Though most princesses normally would be described as frail and timid, she was the exact opposite. Her white-clad underarms and wrists were broader than most women’s, and her hands were both covered by thick mitts. Now she was standing right in front of the wall and took one step back. She made a fist and pulled her arm back, and before I was actually able to realize, what she was planning, she had already punched the wall.

A shockwave blew away both me and my self-esteem, seeing her stand at the exact same spot, as before, upright. After the dust flew away, her blond-brunette locks were now flowing out from beneath her cloak, as the shockwave also blew away her hood. She turned around and gave me a proud, yet in this situation intimidating smile.

Who is this Princess? One Punch Man?

“You know,” she said, “to this date not even a mountain was able to withstand my power.”

Chapter 5 – Down the Rabbit Hole

Following the hole in the wall was a case of stairs. At least I hoped so, since everything I could see was a pitch of black. It wouldn't be nice to go all Alice and having to beat a demon queen in a match of croquet. Although this was exactly what we were going to do. Though Princess Abc with her One Punch probably would be able to hole-in-one **and** punch Miss Dementia thus ruining her pretty face.

“She's amazing, isn't she?” Shelly asked whilst walking towards the hole.

“That definitely was **not** princess-like!”

Aster and I followed, Aster taking down his blinds again.

“There is only one big room beneath those stairs. It is ... a library?”

“Well, at least that seems to fit the description of someone stealing grimoires.”

“There's something else, but I can't really define it. Maybe a giant ball-shaped crystal?” He put on his blinds again, as we took the first stairs.

“I was wondering,” I began, “how do your surroundings look for you, if don't have your blinds?”

“I guess it's like ... a three-dimensional model where I'm able to move around freely at any speed I like.”

“So, what is it like, with your blindfold?”

“Normal? I don't have any comparison, sadly.” He gave me a dry laugh. “As I said, I lost my real eyes as a child, and I can't remember how it was before at all. Guess, I was really young, when it happened.”

“That's ... interesting.”

“I can't use them because it would cost all my mana, and I'd say, I have quite a lot. My body's mana circulation somehow adjusted to those eyes but there is another reason why I am not very fond of using them.”

“What is it? And what the fuck is a mana circulation?!”

“Shelly, I guess he really is from another dimension.”

Huh, he knows too?

“I told you.” I heard from below us.

“The mana circulation is the same as the blood circulation. As our blood contains mana, our body will use blood as source of energy for spellcasting. Of course, we die, if we lose too much of our blood. But that's not the reason I prefer not using the eyes. The reason is simply that the giant input of information makes my head feel like it's going to overflow. Which basically means I get headaches very easily.”

“We reached the bottom!” By which Shelly meant her and Princess Abc.

“Maybe we should catch up.” Aster exclaimed laughing. We stopped near the first few steps to talk. Sunlight was still reaching us. A few meters down the stairs were small orange lights. Torches? I followed Aster and after around 50 steps we reached a metal door. Shelly and the Princess were already waiting for us.

“Are you done talking, or can we proceed?” Shelly seemed a bit on edge.

“Let's go.”

She laid her hand on the door handle. Surprisingly the door wasn't locked. But then again who would have thought of locking a door hidden underground by a thick stone wall?

We entered the room.

What we found was a library.

“Are those grimoire’s?” I asked.

“I think so ...”, even Shelly was stunned.

“Say, what is the average life expectancy of Succubi?”

“Around 5 centuries.” Princess Abc answered.

“But even if she was collecting those her whole life, it’s not possible that she only stole those from our city.” Aster realized. “No, she must have been collecting those from other cities, kingdoms, or even continents. How many are those?”

The cave was around the size of a Ballroom, at least in length, since the first few square meters were filled with bookshelves. They made space for a small way between them. There way maybe a dozen? At least not as impressive as I expected it to be.

“And somewhere in here is my grimoire!” Princess Abc had a frantic expression on her face. Of course, because she was here to find her grimoire and it might take a few hours to find it.

“We might help you, if you could describe, how it looks.” Shelly proposed.

“It has our family emblem on its’ cover and spine.” She pointed at the pin holding together her cloak. It was a red rose. It would be no surprise, if there was a family having a white rose as an emblem.

“We should search for it, separately.” Shelly declared.

I took the backmost row. On both sides, my sight was blocked by those books. They were pretty much all same-looking. At least their shape. Each of the spines glaring at me had different colors, but that was it. I didn’t remember what color my book had, sadly, but then I realized that it didn’t matter.

Are you there?

Of course, I was supposed to search for Princess Abc’s grimoire, but I’m a selfish person. Most people are selfish. It’s the easiest way to survive, I guess.

[I’m on the right side in the lowest row of the second shelf.]

I could have done that before ...

[Of course.]

I kneeled down in front of the second shelf.

Now, which one are you ...

[I’m the tenth book in this row.]

From the left or the right side? I joked.

[Left.]

... Thanks.

I counted the books in this shelf, and picked the tenth. I thought it must be mine since it had this weird symbol on its cover as opposed to the other books in this shelf. Also, my name was written in it.

That’s settled then, I guess.

“Nothing here.” I said, leaving my row.

At the same time, I heard Aster shout: “Found it!”

He, Princess Abc, and Shelly came out of their respective rows, and we met in the central corridor. Aster handed it over and Princess Abc somehow let it disappear under her cloak.

“Thank you so much for helping me!” She was really excited.

“I also found my grimoire by the way.”

“That someone like you possesses a grimoire ...”

“Remember, we’re not done yet.” Shelly reminded us. She pointed behind me. There was curtain covering the entrance to another room.

“Oh yeah, there was this crystal ball.” Aster remembered.

“Do you know what it is?”

“I’m sorry, I don’t have any idea what it could be.”

Shelly took the lead and shoved away the curtain. We entered the room just behind her and took a look at the giant flashing crystal ball in front of us. It was taking up at least half of this already big room. We took a few steps further to investigate this ... machine. Its socket was actually covered with metal and a few light bulbs were sticking out. Electricity was used in this world, but this thing was a bit too much for that in my opinion.

“What is this thing ...” Princess Abc was stunned.

“Some kind of machine, apparently.” Shelly stated the obvious.

I took a closer look at this thing and realized it actually had a hatch. Of course, I opened it. A wave of hot air touched my face and caused me to jerk back.

“What are you doing?!” I could hear Shelly shout.

The hot air vanished and luckily, I didn’t get any serious burns from this sudden attack. I peeped at the contents of the hatch and I was surprised to find a grimoire lying in there. It had the average size of a grimoire and had a grey cover. I touched it, but drew my finger back, since it was still hot.

“Leave that to me.” Princess Abc said, and weirdly tried taking it between her palms, that were covered by her mitts.

“It’s ... grey?” She appeared to be dumbfounded by the sight of this grimoire.

“I remember seeing a bunch of grey ones in the front rows of this library.” Shelly pointed out, her hands in a thinker-pose.

“What does this mean?” I think I was startled, but at the same time I had no idea what this was supposed to mean. I have only been in this world for a couple of hours after all.

Princess Abc was waving the grimoire around and blew at it, so it got cooler. Then she opened it. “That it lost its powers.” I looked over her shoulder as she flipped through the blank pages of the book.

“Is something like this even possible?” Aster asked.

“grimoires are relics created centuries ago. Nowadays you wouldn’t be able to do this under normal circumstances, except if you had a device from that time.” She looked up at the machine. “And this might be what caused it.”

“Oh, you figured it out already?” Contrary to my expectations the voice saying this was actually male, instead of female. It was Raven Way, just as endearing as his older sister next to him, Ebony Dark’ness Dementia.

“Oh my god, Raven! It’s him! That cute boy I was sucking at! Actually, I thought he was ... dead.” Her voice took a dark turn towards her last sentence. Her voice was seductive yet forbidding simultaneously. I wondered, if her brother was also as double-edged as his sister.

“There we have our culprits!” Shelly exclaimed. “This probably won’t end without a fight, but I’d like to notify you that hereby I declare both of you as arrested.” Her body language was shouting “Objection!” as she said this.

“What a pity. Of course we won’t give up without a fight, but ... there’s one thing I actually wanted to know.” She was hovering to where I was standing at an insane speed, and came really close to my face, touching it with her slender hands.

The same time, she touched my cheek, I felt our bodies go apart, as Princess Abc sent her fist directly into her direction. The Succubus flew away at this same speed, and landed next to Raven.

“Ara, ara, you’re a violent one, aren’t you, Princess?”

Next, Shelly stood in front of both of us, drawing a sword from the sheath attached to her right hip.

“Princess, stand back. I promised to protect both of you.”

“Officer, I am very well able to defend myself.”

“Please, we already had this discussion.”

“Turns out to be interesting, am I right, Sis?” the Incubus stated.

“You might be right Raven. Though I’m not very interested in this pesky police officer. Could you get rid of her? I will take on ... the princess.”

Chapter 6 – Princess Careless strikes back!

Raven and Ebony simultaneously dashed towards their opponents. As soon as she was within the Princess's reach, the Succubus whipped out a knife and slashed across Princess Abc's face. But she wasn't fast enough. The Princess was able to block the attack with the metal plates covering her mitts. The knife made a sharp sound, as it hit the metal.

Shelly at the same time was involved in a fight with Raven. She was fighting with her shortsword, while Raven, who for some reason was wearing a suit, had metal claws attached to his hand.

How can he fight with such a tight attire?, I wondered.

Aster was standing next to me, watching both of them.

"You don't want to join in?" I asked him.

"I prefer not to fight, I'm more on the supporting site." he grinned at me, and then took off his blinds. He seemed to concentrate at the Princess, who was still fighting with Ebony. I could hear him mutter something.

"What kind of cheater is using a knife in hand to hand combat?" I heard Princess Abc say.

"What kind of loser is forgetting their knife for a knife fight?" Her opponent said.

"What kind of dork is not using magic in a fantasy world?" I said, as suddenly the Princess vanished and something sent Ebony flying.

"Oh, there we have it."

Ebony flew upwards, somehow trying to control her direction, which resulted in her drawing weird circles and finally crashing into the ceiling. Dust fell down and caused my nose to twitch.

"Was that you?" I looked back at Aster.

"I specialize in illusionary magic."

"But even so, how was she able to send her flying that easy? This room is around 10 meters tall."

"Magic of course. She used wind to blow her up. Also, before, she used earth magic, to smash the entrance to this cave."

"Doesn't she need to chant a spell like you did just now?"

"I know only one thing for sure: Bending the four elements is the easiest way to cast magic. But even so, she shouldn't be able to do it without at least some magic words."

"Earlier, she mentioned she was trained in hand-to-hand combat since she was a little girl. Maybe she is really experienced? She is a princess after all." I proposed.

"That might be possible."

He took on his blinds again and the Princess was visible, just as Ebony pushed herself off the ceiling towards the ground and onto the Princess. She sat on her hips and started punching her. Though the Princess somehow was able to dodge some of her hits, few of them hit her. Just, as Ebony pulled out another knife, the princess rammed her hand onto the ground and threw Ebony just in our direction. Aster pulled me to the side, as Ebony was thrown against the metal socket of the machine. She pulled herself onto it and got her wand out of her ... cleavage?

"Do all female wizards hide their wands between their breasts?"

"I have pecs that would be enough to hide wands in between them, but I've never tried it out."

"You have muscles?"

Aster would be considered rather slender, and I wasn't able to really determine whether he was lying or not. But muscles were in existence.

The wand was not the only thing Ebony had in store. Under the few inches of fabric covering her body, she was taking out some kind of weapon and sent it towards the princess. They looked like Shuriken, but the way they were flying was really off. Soon I realized, Ebony was actually controlling them with her wand. Just like Aster before, she was muttering some foreign words to herself and together with the movements of her wand she was able to control them at will. Princess Abc saw those Shuriken coming, but due to their random movement, and since it was six of them, she wasn't able to dodge them. She got a few cuts all over her body, before being pinned to the ground at last. Of course she tried to free herself, by simply ripping her clothes, but that was not possible as the Shuriken suddenly started melting, and forming bonds, anchoring her in the ground.

"What is this?" She desperately asked, as she tried to free herself.

"My personal handcuffs of course. I'll come back to you later, honey. First there is something ... I'd like to know."

She ran in my direction and flashed another knife. Barely able to defend myself somehow, I raised my hand. The grimoire followed the movement of my hand and so it was able to whip her knife out of her hand.

"So you indeed are in possession of this ... grimoire."

At this exact moment all fighting noises fell silent.

"He has formed a pact with the grimoire?" Someone, I think Raven, said.

"But that's impossible!" Shelly exclaimed.

"You- Nathan, you aren't human by any chance, aren't you?" The Princess asked from the ground.

"Of course, I'm human. Why wouldn't I be human is the real question here."

"Well, that's because-"

"Humankind... went extinct." Ebony finished the sentence.

I didn't even have the time to think about what she said, because she already dashed in my direction and tried to hit me. But I blocked her attack again with my grimoire. In the meantime, Princess Abc managed to melt the metal holding her back. Aster chanted some spells, trying to help me. But that was not necessary, since Princess Abc already threw herself at the Succubus. They crashed against the machine, just a few inches away from my face, causing it to crack at some points.

"Whoa, watch out, princess careless!"

"It's Carelis!" I could hear a muffled voice.

She really is sensitive, isn't she ...

"Sister!" Raven shouted, abandoning Shelly. But she wouldn't let herself get shaken off. She chased after him, and pinned him down, just a few feet away from me.

"What have you done, you mediocre dunce!" Ebony shouted, pushing the Princess off of her. The crash caused the machine to bent immensely and the top part was hanging above us. Cracks were crossing the crystal ball on top and they kept getting bigger.

"The energy stored in this machine contains the spells of at least a hundred grimoires! They'll break away."

The spells inside the ball could be seen as some kind of multicolored goop leaking through the cracks, dripping on the floor, sometimes throwing sparks. Some of them actually hit me, but they weren't hot or anything, they... they simply were.

"What will happen if they escape?" I asked, feeling the anxieties in my voice. But no-one had to answer this question, as a spark already hit Shelly and knocked her out in an instant. Raven, still below the weight of her body, had a baffled expression on his face but he seized his opportunity and immediately threw her off of him.

He had trouble getting speed so I actually was prepared for his attack. Just as he decreased the distance between us another small crack happened to open up, and allowed another spell to escape. One hand in front of me, to block Raven, I instinctively used my other to protect myself from the dripping goop. What happened was... I threw it right into Ravens face. It blocked his view and he stumbled forward, now standing at the place inhabited by me merely one second ago.

"Shit! What is this crap?" He screamed, trying to tear it off of his face. But it really was sticking to him, and what's more, his body seemed to absorb it. Colored sparks left his face in irregular intervals. Then he just stood there, his face in his hands.

"You little brat ... what did you do?!" Ebony was shouting at me, while at the same time bestowing her brother with a frightened look. She took his shoulders and shook him, looking at his covered eyes. I wasn't able to determine, whether they were closed, or opened. But I could sense numerous thoughts running through Ravens mind, and in this case, I figured, they would be open.

Aster knelt next to the Princess, who also was on her knees. They both seemed unsure of what to do with this situation. Sure, they could've used the perturbation, to just ditch this whole situation, but first of all, Shelly was unconscious, and second: Our initial goal was to find **and** capture the thieves. Leaving them here would either mean, to let them get away, or let them die, in case this machine totally spazzes out.

"Princess." Ebony turned around to face the one she addressed. "I'm not done with you. But sadly, I have to inform you that you've slid down a few points on my... priority list." She said as she turned around my way.

That's when I again prepared myself to be attacked, although the only skill I possessed, being helpful at the time, was dodging.

And doing this weird thingy with my grimoire.

Damn, that's fucking cool. This could probably be able to knock someone out, if used properly. I took my right foot one step back as soon as I saw her opening her wings.

But then she was stopped.

"!" Her startled face turned back. "Raven. What are you doing?" She spoke to the one holding her hand. Raven had let go of his face already and he appeared to be confused.

"Ebony ... I'm really sorry, I have to say this. But I can't let you kill this boy ..." His grip tightened, as he spoke, manifesting his determination.

"Why is that?" Disappointment in her voice.

He pulled her back, pulling himself forward. He was quite a bit taller than me, and his arms embraced my shoulders that were of course broader than mine. From the corner of my eye, I saw Aster and the princess stand up in an instant, the princess raising her fists, while Aster was

clapping his hands together, as if he was to prepare a spell. My reaction time was close to zero, as this sudden attack together with what just happened left me rather perplexed.

And Shelly, well she did nothing, but I appreciate, that she would have probably tried her best, to get me out of this troublesome situation. As the man answered, the overflowing magic absorbing machine seemed to be the smallest problem, at least in this world.

“That’s because ...” my energy left my body within a split second, “I’m deeply in love with him.” As my lips got touched by his. I felt the shockwave of at least three jaws dropping.

Chapter 7 – So, apparently I’ve got my grimoire back!

As our lips parted, I realized: *This was my first kiss.*

I always wondered, whether my first kiss might happen to be with a guy, but actually I wouldn’t have thought it would be as good. But why did he have to do the tongue thing? Gross.

I was definitely blushing, especially, when he gave me his confident smile.

“Sorry, I had to lend some power.” He said, looking into my eyes, which was really creepy after some seconds.

Next, he turned away from me, facing his sister. She was already preparing herself to be attacked. In the mean-time Aster got Shelly onto his shoulders. Everyone was wondering what would happen next. And no-one seemed to care about the machine. Too many minutes already have passed, and I don’t really want to know, what would happen if the machine overflowed. The controls were totally overboard.

As Raven jumped towards his sister, she hadn’t the time to do anything, since she got knocked out from behind. The sound of metal hitting the ground could be heard as a plate hit the ground. It was the one covering Princess Abc’s mitts.

“Shit.”

“Did you really just swear?” I asked her.

“What? Of course I did. To attach those would cost ... something.”

“Why did you do this?” Raven suddenly infiltrated our conversation.

“Because we have something about to explode and having you two fight would definitely last too long. So, I seized my opportunity.”

“Soo- Are we running?” I asked. And we did.

Well, at least I did. The Princess, Raven and Aster took themselves some time to pick up the unconscious. By that time, I’ve already reached the stairs.

Dust was falling down from the ceiling, as I climbed up the stairs. Though I was the first to run, I just managed to get out of the cave behind Raven and the Princess, followed by Aster, whose condition was maybe as bad as mine. Though, without the extra bodyweight of Shelly, he would’ve also been faster.

Probably.

I was touched by the warm summers sunlight as I left the cave. The others were already quite a few steps away from me. Though Princess Abc interestingly was coming back my direction. She ran in huge steps, before finally jumping of just a few inches in front of me. As she leapt over me, the sun was briefly covered by her panties. As I ran, my gaze followed her trajectory, which caused me to stumble and fall over, as I tried bending my neck to hard.

She smashed against the rocks behind me, and though I wasn’t really able to see anything, I could hear multiple hits. Then something crumbled. From her point of landing on dust and even rocks fell down, as she continued smashing the mountain. Probably with the help of her magic. She must have been really careful, as she also could have smashed that mountain in one go. After being on firm ground again, she leapt back, in order to not get smashed by the following rocks. Next, she crossed her open palms and took a few steps towards the fallen rocks, pushing them inside the cave, like a cork.

Then she ran away.

Taking me with her, we reached the others, who already were some meters away from the cave. The ride was really unpleasant, as I was hanging in her arms, being shaken the whole time. At least I managed to get some words out. “Pr-inc-ess ... Care-less...” I managed to say within a 100 meters of being shaken, although I highly doubt, my words reached her.

She let go of me, as she reached the group, and I was about to join the circle of the unconscious, when a weird sounding bang kept me awake. Followed by some weird colored light, the machine exploded, and due to the Princess’s improvised cork, the explosion didn’t manage to make any bigger damage.

“It’s over.” I exhaled.

“Yes, it is.”

“Probably.”

“It seems so, yes.”

“Sooo, are we going back?” I asked.

“Yes.”

“Probably.”

“It seems so, yes.”

“Ah, good to know.” I turned and attempted to follow the road.

“Wrong direction.” Aster said, who was already going the other direction.

“Shit.”

We went for quite a while, and I decided to check, whether any changes happened to my grimoire. As I opened it, I was greeted by a sight I have already forgotten. My name written on the first page, my stats on the next. But then I realized, some of the letters were blurred, and moved around weirdly. And then ...

[Level:] >>2<<

[HP:] >>105<<

[MP:] >>100<<

“What the-” I accidentally spoke out loud.

[You have gained experience.]

[Your capability of taking damage has grown by 5 per cent.]

[You are now able to use spells.]

Spells?

I opened the next page.

On it I was presented a selection of skills.

[Choose one skill to learn.]

What but ... the selection was ginormous. Anything from simple healing to mind control was listed. And I was free to choose.

[I contain all knowledge of this world.]

Yeah, you said that before, but ...

[Please keep in mind, that you might not be able to use all skills available at the time.]

When I looked on the mind control spell, my head was flooded with information, from how this spell works, to what it costs. It would be 1000 MP.

Why does everything look like a video game?

[I figured this would be the easiest for you to understand in your language. Shall I translate it differently?]

No, actually it's okay. *Though somewhat irritating, considering this is a fantasy world.*

I decided to postpone the choosing of a skill until later. The possibilities were to huge. I closed the book.

[I am a grimoire.]

Shut up.

[My apologies.]

Though my adventure didn't turn out to go the way I imagined, I definitely couldn't wait to explore this world more and more.

Growl.

But for now, the only thing I considered was the culinary delicacies this world would bring.

This is fine.

Arc 2 – A Decline of Corpses

Chapter 8 – He wants my dick, but as long as I am allowed to live in his mansion it's okay, I guess.

“Ahh~” I leaned back.

After an adventure the best thing to do would of course be taking a bath. It was quite hot but the high temperature was actually really comforting.

Then something touched my dick.

It was another dick.

Raven raised from the water and looked at me. He was horny, definitely.

“Seeing you this way, makes me really happy, Master Nathan.” He dangerously got near me.

“Stop calling me Master, dumbass.” I scolded him.

“But master ...” he twisted in an exaggerated way. He was well built, slim but he had muscles.

“You’re now the owner of this mansion, and therefore I shall be your servant!” He definitely was too excited about this fact.

“The spell Raven got hit with had to be a love charm.” I remembered Aster saying this.

“That’s why he attacked his sister.” Princess Abc figured. “He tried to protect you.”

At this time we had already reached the police station and Ebony got imprisoned. Shelly was still unconscious but thanks to some healers we were able to wake her up.

“Please don’t arrest me, I don’t want to get separated from my little Nathan!” Was what Raven said after Shelly woke up. I was neutral to this. I mean he was somewhat of a dangerous criminal but at the same time he would make a useful ... subordinate. And since I was just merely about to understand this world it would be good to have someone fighting for me. That’s why I decided to put in a good word for him.

That’s how I ended up being the owner of Dementia Mansion.

It was located in the eastern part of the city. For some orientation: The police office was located in the central part of the city, while Ataraxia Academy took up the whole northern district.

The mansions property also involved a large Japanese style bathing house. You probably wouldn’t consider it Japanese in this world, but for me that’s the best way to describe it. It also contained a hot spring which we were bathing in right now. Since it was near the end of the seventh month, at least in my world (I still have to figure out, how time works here) it was warm outside, even at nearly midnight.

“Well, I guess I’m going back inside.” I said.

“Whaat? I thought we could have some fun.” Raven crossed his arms onto the edge of the spring and I could see him paddling with his feet a few feet away.

“Dude, I understand you need to ... I don’t know, use my libido to get power, you’re an incubus after all, but I’d prefer to not get raped outside of battle. Also, I have to do some research.”

“What a shame. But in this case, I’m going in too.” he lifted himself completely out of the water and followed me inside.

We quickly got ourselves dry and after putting some light clothing on, I went to the main hall. The mansion was too big, and I still haven’t discovered every single room in this giant piece of housing. Without the help of Raven I would be lost in here.

“You want to do some research?” Raven asked me. His reddish hair was still wet, but he didn’t seem to mind it.

“Yes, do you have something like a library?” I asked.

“Of course. Follow me.”

We remained in the first of three floors, as he guided me through a corridor, with a double door on the left side. He opened that door.

The library was high enough to cover all of the floors of this mansion. Books were everywhere, shelves only sometimes interrupted for stairs to lead to even more books.

“That’s ... a bit too extravagant.”

“My sister loved books, not only grimoires. You know, when you’re alive for 500 years, you have lots of free time.”

“Where did she get the money from, though?”

“Umm, inheritance? That money, as well as the mansion was our parents, who got it from their parents. Though I really don’t know how it was enough for generations to pass.”

The reason I decided to visit the library, which is something I wouldn’t normally do, as I am not a great fan of books, was to do research on some things, that were weirdly off-putting.

“Humankind ... went extinct.” I remembered Ebony saying that.

I was human, obviously, as that is, what the omniscient grimoire said. But in that case, what were the others? Well, of course I could ask my grimoire, not this time though, as Shelly decided to keep it as a piece of evidence for Ebony’s trial, and because she figured it would be way to dangerous in the hands of someone like me. It did not matter though, as I was sure to find all the information needed in this huge library. Although I planned on getting more information through the grimoire, as I doubted, the information here was complete.

“So, where do I start?” I asked myself. The idea of reading through thousands of books was not very appealing to me.

“Just ask it, what you’re looking for.”

“Ask whom?”

“You know, the library. This one’s actually pretty nice, it’ll definitely help you out. I’ve stumbled upon some very ... ill-mannered ones, over the past few years.”

I did not dare to question this weird remark.

“So, um, I’m searching for some information on ... humanity? I guess?”

What did that mean, I guess? I’m pretty sure, I want this information!

After asking that, I was pretty sure, I heard some murmuring coming from somewhere in this room. After a few seconds, this weird background noise toned down, and with a weird hiccup sound, dozens of books were released from their respective shelves, and landed before me, in an unorganized mess.

“Um ... thanks a lot.”

“Don’t blame him, he’s gotten pretty old.”

“Well, putting that aside, let’s have a look, at what we’ve got here.” I took a closer look at those books.

“Why is it, that you are so interested in humanity, I wonder?”

“Well, as your sister said, humankind appears to have gone extinct. But I am pretty sure to be human, so that’s why I’m perplexed.” The grimoire also confirmed it after all. I should have asked it directly, before it being taken away by the police, but it did not occur to me at that point.

I opened the first book. “You don’t happen to know anything, do you ...” I asked Raven, just in case.

“Well, I know, that humankind did indeed exist, and that it doesn’t exist anymore but ... I wasn’t that good at school, you know? Also, when you’re a couple of centuries old, you just happen to forget some things.”

“Well, as long as you have that body of yours, you won’t need education I suppose. Also, why the heck are you naked?”

“It’s in the middle of summer and pretty hot.”

“Could you please get yourself some clothes? You’re quite a distraction.”

“Sure master.”

He was without any doubt obedient, but god, he had some interesting quirks.

My research wasn’t really successful. I found out, that a race called humankind indeed existed in this world, but that was it. No information on their passing was to be found and also, I really wasn’t able to find any information on how I was different, compared to the others.

Come to think of it, what race would Princess Abc and Shelly be called? That would also hinder my research.

I could simply ask Raven about it or wait until I see my grimoire again. Although Raven probably would only tell me their name and that would be it.

I realized it was getting late. Tomorrow would definitely be a busy day, so I figured it would be good to catch some sleep. Raven already showed me, where I could sleep, when we arrived, so at least that room I knew exactly where to find.

“I wonder, if he will be making breakfast tomorrow.” I spoke out loud, as I walked through the door of the library.

“I hope he’s as good at cooking as he is at ... other things though ...”

Chapter 9 – Now that my magic isn't evidence for a series of thefts, I have to go to school.

Even though this society conforms the standards of a basic medieval-like fantasy world, people here sure are smarter than we were a thousand years ago. This is due to it having an actual fleshed out educational system, and with it comes compulsory visit of any educational institution. Mostly this is to prevent any possible damage caused by inexperienced magic users.

Such as me.

So, I must go to school, don't I...?

“Well at least I managed to talk you out of this situation”, Shelly said, as she was explaining the whole situation to me. “Unauthorized magic use comes with a high penalty. How old were you again?”

“Fourteen.”, I said.

“Oh, so my effort was unnecessary, I see.”

“Why is that?”

“I thought you were much older, sixteen, seventeen maybe.”

I get that quite often. I'm rather tall for my age, but still I think you could read my age off of my face. It's not like I have a beard or anything. Even so, I consider my skin to be pretty smooth-looking. At least for the parts of it that I use make-up on to cover my pimples. Having older sisters comes with its perks.

Having had.

I'll miss them.

Probably.

“Our legislation makes people accountable for magic-related incidents starting at the age of fifteen.”, Shelly continued her explanation. “I decided, that it is best to enroll you into Ataraxia academy.”

“Is it okay, to simply send me to school? I mean, I'm pretty sure according to the government I don't exist.”

“Oh, it will be pretty easy to fake that.” Hearing a police officer talk so openly about committing crimes was quite baffling. “During summer fires happen quite often, and if I remember it correctly, one just happened to be a few towns away in Silica, destroying the townhall, and with it many important documents.”

“Don't they have some sort of back-up?” Not having one would be pretty inefficient in my opinion.

“Yeah, no it was quite a shithole, honestly. The town was simply too small for anyone to invest money into security measures. Normally a certain type of archive magic is used, to exchange information between a town and the government or in between towns but that requires a physical spell binder, which in most cases is a book. Basically, the information is stored in that book and can be read by any person that is connected to that spell-binder, but not stored. Or at least no-one would think about storing such information, as it changes daily. No-one could provide the amount of mana to do such a thing.”

...

“Why do you know so much about this topic ...”, I was quite fascinated by her knowledge even though I only understood half of what she said. Was such a thing required for being a police officer?

“Oh, the mayor of Silica, he is my brother.” Well ... how disappointing. “I once thought about becoming involved in politics, but I decided to dedicate my life to enforcing the law instead. Anyway, there should be no problem regarding your ... existence. We simply say that the fire in Silica broke out shortly before you were about to move to Ataraxia.”

“I feel pretty bad, doing this.”

“Come on, don’t be a coward. This office so often reeks of illegal herbs and no-one questioned it, even though we share buildings with the town-hall.”

“You ... what now?!”

Enforce the law? Who are you kidding, you only enforce the law as long as it does not affect you in a negative way.

“Well, whatever.”, I decided to simply brush it off. “Let’s do this ... I guess.” I stood up from my seat across from Shelly and wordlessly left her office.

The registration thankfully went without any issue. I guess next time, Shelly asks me to legally break the law I shouldn’t hesitate too much. Also, Raven who was with us during the appointment was my legal guardian now ... I hope he doesn’t insist on me calling him daddy.

“By the way, I’ve scheduled an appointment with the headmaster of the academy in a couple of minutes.”

“Wow, thanks for telling me so early.” My mom used to schedule my doctor’s appointments without telling me, which lead to many situations of me having to leave a game of LOL or something similar early because of not being informed right away. Stuff like that pisses me off.

But I obliged, because what else was there to do? So we headed north for the academy. I’ve seen it from afar those couple of times I was actually able to step outside a bit and walk around the city, but getting closer to it, it became bigger and bigger, and it was the first time I actually could capture how big it was. Most of the buildings south of the academy were actually so big, they covered most of the academy’s smaller buildings from afar, making it look way smaller than it was. Those buildings were some sort of student dormitories, Shelly told me.

“Ataraxia academy is one of the biggest magic schools on this continent. Students from all around the world come to this school, that’s why these apartments were built. As far as I know the academy’s dormitories differ from those in other schools by being completely student-governed to teach our youth some independence since” – that part she whispered to me – “nobles these days can be quite spoiled, honestly ...”

A broad road led up to the academy’s entrance which gave off the vibe of a noble’s mansion. The gate made of two lattice gates each bearing the emblem of the academy was wide open, even though the school was on summer break. The entrance to what appeared to be the main building was also open, either signaling that the school was indeed open, or because the air conditioner was broken. They certainly have air conditioners, without any doubt. Magical air conditioners.

We went inside the main building and approached a row of chairs lined up next to a door that was so prominently not centered on the wall, it was kinda off-putting. Though it made sense, since the center of the room was occupied by a double staircase that went up from both sides of the wall meeting in its center against the backdrop of a large stained-glass window irregularly changing its colors. Below the staircase was an opening in the wall containing a winding staircase leading into the basement I suppose. Maybe secret library. Maybe torture chamber.

We took place on the empty chairs waiting for the principal.

After a couple of minutes the door to the principal's office opened and I was greeted by two unexpected surprises. The first was princess Abc coming out of the office, the second was the principal themselves. Thing is I could not really determine a gender, as their body was entirely covered in blue feathers, their head presenting a black curved beak. The only thing indicative of a gender would be the eyes, which gave off quite the feminine vibe. When the principal opened their beak their voice was surprisingly pleasant to hear, maybe because I expected an annoying squawk, but their voice that, again, was devoid of any gender, actually came in the form a steady melodic sing-sang.

"I have high expectations of you, Lady Carelis. But that doesn't mean you should put yourself under too much pressure."

"Don't worry, I will achieve the necessary score in no time at all, Principal Featherhead."

"Kehe." I did not quite manage to stifle my laugh. And that caused the princess to notice me.

"Oh my.", she said with a mix of disbelief and disgust to her face.

"Ah, I was expecting you.", Principal Featherhead said, before Princess Abc was able to comment on our sudden appearance. "Lady Carelis, good luck."

"Thank you very much.", she said, before approaching me, as Shelly and the principal were exchanging pleasantries.

"What are you doing here?"

"Oh, Shelly decided it would make sense for me to get some education. Well, it does make sense, considering I have no idea at all how ... well anything here works, really."

"Hmm, so you'll be going to school next year, huh? But I wonder in which year you'll end up."

"Why?"

"Well, how old are you, fourteen?" She actually guessed my age right, so I nodded. "Well placing you into the same year as all those 12-year-olds would definitely be weird, to say the least, but then again, your knowledge is far surpassed by all of them."

"Ugh, shut up.", I said annoyed, because she was right.

She giggled.

"You know, you're the only one to tell royalty to 'shut up'." She brushed a strand of hair behind her ear. "I like that. It's ... new."

I kinda felt as if she was complimenting me, but what kind of person would compliment someone for insulting them?

"Nathan.", I suddenly heard Shelly say. "We, er, have an appointment."

"Right.", I said, and followed her into the principal's office.

"If you need any help, I'm sure, Shelly will know how to contact me.", the princess said, turning around. "Bye.", she said, as she waved from behind.

In the principal's office, Shelly explained the whole situation, or rather the lie she fabricated about the fire in Silica. As it seemed that fire also happened to destroy the school. Because of course it did.

"I see, that's the situation we're dealing with.", the principal sighed in exasperation. "The thing is, as one of the most prestigious academies on the entire continent, we don't simply take students in at a whim. Normally you would have to take an entrance exam but the regular exams already were taken a couple of weeks ago. So, I'm at a bit of a loss on how to deal with you ..."

“That’s what I thought. But principal, do you still have these practical homework sorta missions over summer?”, Shelly asked.

“Of course.”

“What about making them his entrance exams?”

“That would work, but ... school break has already started two weeks ago. He would without a doubt be at a disadvantage, if he were to take on missions starting now.”

“But is there really no other way?”, Shelly sighed. She really was used to thinks working out her way.

I took a quick glance around the room, before I asked hesitantly: “What exactly are those missions?”

“Oh, it really depends.”, Principal Featherhead answered. “It can be obtaining rare minerals, slaying monsters, or even fighting crime alongside the police. But as far as I know no-one applied for helping out the police, am I right, officer?”

“Well, actually ...”, Shelly murmured as we gave each other a quick glance, probably having the exact same idea at the same time.

Shelly cleared her throat. “Actually, Nathan here did help me solve a series of thefts recently.”

Principal Featherhead made an interested squawk-like sound that demanded further explanation.

“He helped me solve a series of grimoire-related thefts, so if there’s any way, we can make that count ...”

“Yes, I suppose that would work. I would need a full report from you Officer, then I could give him one duty point.”

“That would be wonderful!” Shelly brimmed with excitement. She actually seemed more excited about this whole situation than I was. Or maybe she was just happy to have helped me.

“Well, then you just need to fill out the application form, and you’ll be a new student at Ataraxia Academy.”

She handed me a couple of sheets, and after a few more minutes and a bloody fingerprint later, I became a student at Ataraxia Academy.

Chapter 10 – School dormitories, that are actually pretty cool? They exist!

After I filled out the form, I was assigned a dormitory room. For some reason every student had a room located on the academy's property, though in my case it wasn't necessary as I had an entire mansion at my disposal. But since Shelly had to write a report about that grimoire theft I figured, I should just explore the school grounds on my own.

The Boys dormitories were in the western part of the building. There was an extra door on the outside, but since I was already inside the main building, I tried figuring out a way into the building that way. At the same time I tried to explore the academy as much as possible. While the southern part of the building where the principal's office was also located seemed to only contain rooms that were used by the faculty, the northern part was an entirely different story.

There were two wings, which had to contain classrooms and squeezed in between was a well-kept garden. There were a lot of wooden chairs or benches, some of which were occupied by students that stayed over summer, but there also were tables that students would probably occupy at lunch-time during warmer months.

What seemed odd to me though was that both wings certainly did not have enough room for classrooms, that could fit at least a couple hundred of students. The only other buildings I was aware of, were the girls' dormitories, in the eastern building and the boys' dormitories in the western building, towards which I was headed to.

I pushed open a swinging door, that led me to a wide corridor, that had at least a dozen doors on each side. Each of the doors had a number on them and the names of the students occupying them were also engraved below that number.

Shared rooms, huh?

After I took a closer look at a couple of those doors and realized that the three-digit numbers followed a pattern. Doors on the left side from where I came from started with a one, while doors on the right side started with a two. I figured that those must be the dormitories for the first two school years, and that I probably wouldn't find number 314 on that floor. I spotted a flight of stairs at the end of the corridor that would lead me to the second floor.

After I got upstairs, I got to the end of the corridor to find number 314. I tried to ignore the lack of a 313 and instead just thought to myself, that even in another world people seemed to be superstitious. I read the names under the number. One of course was my own name, which was quite baffling since I signed the application form not even half an hour ago, the other one was that of my roommate.

I knocked on the door.

"Come in.", a boyish voice said from the other side.

I opened the door and said: "Excuse me, I think I'll be living here from now on." *Or rather not*, I mused thinking about my mansion.

"Hi, I'm Raynard.", the dark skinned boy greeted me from his bed in the corner of the room.

People of color, they do exist!

"Yeah, the door already told me. I'm Nathan.", I said, taking a closer look at the room. And I immediately noticed the total absence of furniture in the right part from the door. The left was occupied by a huge bed, a gigantic bookshelf in front of which was some sort of beanbag chair. But the most puzzling thing I only saw, when I entered the room, and looked at his part of the wall next to the door.

There actually was a window showing a deep landscape, which should have been impossible, considering behind that wall was actually the corridor I just came from.

“Aside from the fact, that this is a pretty cool trick, why is it that only one part of the room is furnished?”

“Right, you’re a complete newbie. You can also do that ‘pretty cool trick’. Just put your hands on the wall.”

With nothing else left to do, I motioned to the wall, that seemed to be mine and put my hands on it.

“And now?” As I said that my hands sunk into the wall. I lost my balance nearly bumped my face against the wall.

“What the-?”, I said with a mixture of surprise and disgust. Imagine dipping your entire lower arm into a sea of honey. It was weirdly sticky.

“Haha, yeah it probably feels weird.”

“It’s gross, but go on.”

“Now just let your magic flow, and imagine, what your part of the room should look like. Basically everything is possible!” I could not see his face, but he sure sounded excited.

I tried to imagine, what my old room looked like. *I couldn’t possibly bring my game console to this world, could I?* I decided not to do that. As far as I knew television and game consoles did not exist here. Who knew what would happen if I brought such advanced technology to this world.

In the meantime I already had created a bed that was inspired by the one back home. Though I made it look more medieval-style and less IKEA.

Next I created my own bookshelf. I figured having a couple of comics, books or even light novels from my world would do no harm. If someone questioned them I could just say, they aren’t from very well-known authors. Lastly I placed an armchair in the corner opposite to my bed. I liked sitting sideways on them and letting my feet dangle off the armrest.

With my work finished, I took a couple of steps back to look at my magnum opus.

It had a familiar feel to it, that made me feel at peace yet sad, given the circumstances.

“Was that your room back at home?” Raynard suddenly stood next to me.

“Yeah, it was. Still is.”

“Same here. That view from that window shows the exact same things I would see, when I looked out the window back at home.”

While our situations definitely couldn’t be more different, I was quite in awe by how considerate he was.

“About that bookshelf”, he asked, “did you try filling it up with books you read?”

“Of course.”, I answered.

“Won’t work.”, he said, taking a step forward and taking a book out of the shelf. “This magic only replicates things as much as you can remember them. And how likely is it that you remembered a book in it’s entirety?”

He handed me a random volume of *American Kitsune* and I proceeded to flip through the pages. Most of them were white, except for a couple of sentences that actually stuck on my mind.

“I tried the same, when I made my shelf, turns out I must actually buy books or you know get ahold of them some way.”

With a sigh I put it back into its shelf.

“Well so much for that.”

Suddenly he put a hand on my shoulder. “Let me show you something really cool. Get onto your bed.”, he said as he jumped into his own. After I also got into my bed he said: “Watch this.” and with a quick snap of his finger he turned the light off. Instead above our heads the ceiling glowed with the light of what must have been a thousand stars against the backdrop of the dark cosmos.

“Wow.” In that moment I thought I might just stay here.

“So will you be staying here over the summer?”, he asked me.

“Not quite. I still have to collect some uh – what’d she call it – duty points?”

“Oh yeah, the summer homework thingy.”, he said with a troubled expression.

“How many points did you collect so far?” According to the principal summer break was only another month. He surely would have collected at least one point.

“Oh, eh ... not a single one.” His cheeks took on a slightly lighter skin tone, as he twitched with embarrassment.

“What? That’s not good!”, I honestly voiced my opinion.

“Yeah, thing is, I couldn’t find a partner. Most of the missions seem like something you shouldn’t take on alone.”

“Why is that?”

“A good portion of the students has already collected their points, or they are at home. Also I was hiding in my room for most of the time, because the final exams were really draining.”

“But there must be some missions that are easier to take on. I mean as a first year you would be pretty screwed from what you’ve told me.” I expressed my concerns not for the sake of the first years, but for my own, as I had basically no practical experience in using magic.

“And that’s exactly why first and second years don’t have to take on any missions. Heck, they aren’t even allowed to take part in the practical trimester.”

“Practical trimester?”

“Yeah, years three to six have the option to additionally take part in a practical trimester after winter break, usually in the form of tournament or such. But only, if their grades are good and not likely to drop due to extra pressure.”

I was so thankful for him not to question my lack of knowledge. “This school sure seems to be practice-oriented.”, I commented.

“Well, what use is there in knowing how to blow up things, if you don’t get to blow up things?”

“Wow, is this your real persona?”, I joked.

“Just you wait, until you see me in action.”, he answered with a smug expression. We shared a nice laugh, after which Raynard said: “Speaking of which: Maybe we should take a look at the mission board.”

“I take it, that we are now partners in crime?”

“You bet!” He stood up from his bed, and offered me his hand. I grasped it and pulled myself up on it.

Yep, I really could get behind the idea of living with him.

Chapter 11 – Pick a quest, and assemble a team

We left our room, and looked for the quest board. It was after noon and the sun shone through the corridors giving them a mysterious vibe.

Raynard told me, that the quest board was usually located in the entrance hall, so that was, where we went. We went through the same door, I took earlier, went past Principal Featherhead's office, as well as past the entrance, where for the second time this day, I spotted that princess, that just kept crossing paths with me.

"Oh my god, that's the princess.", Raynard whispered next to me, his voice cracking in the process. I did not really get why, but whatever.

"Yo, Princess Abc.", I said, not stopping in my tracks. Raynard stayed behind, and I felt his anxious gaze piercing my back. *Well, either he is afraid of the princess, or he likes her*, I figured.

"Oh, hey Nathan.", the princess said.

"Wait, you know the princess? She knows you?!"

"Are you looking for missions to take on?", I asked her.

"Yes, I still need two more points. Oh, Shelly told me, that she would write a report of that grimoire incident and make sure that I would get a point for that. So that makes only one more point for me I guess."

"Oh, Shelly actually made me the same offer.", I admitted.

"I know, she already told me that. I just met her a couple of minutes ago, that was when she mentioned it. And as lazy as I am, I of course asked her to not forget to mention my role in this mess."

"Cool. I don't know if you should use the word lazy to describe yourself though ..."

Then I noticed, that Raynard was awkwardly standing beside me the entire time.

"Ah, this is Raynard, by the way. My roommate."

"Oh, I actually know who he is." Suddenly she decided it would be better to be facing him. "Who you are. I mean, we are in the same year, and we are like, what ... 50 students?"

"Yeah." You could tell that he was squeezing it out from somewhere deep within.

"Anyway", I tried to somehow draw the attention to the board. "Have you decided on anything yet?"

"Not really.", she answered. "I mean, there's a couple of monster hunting quests, but they seem really boring."

"Monsters?", I asked. "I haven't seen any monsters since coming to the city."

"Yeah, I heard that hunters keep the area around the city relatively safe. That's why you won't find any monsters within the next couple of hours around the city. They're ... dead!"

"Oh.", I simply replied. "So monster slaying is not in the game for us?"

"Us?", Raynard and Princess Abc exclaimed at the same time.

"Yeah, I thought it might be good to team up? I mean, the princess and I already worked together, so ..." That last bit was directed at Raynard.

"You worked together?", Raynard asked, giving weight to every single word.

At the same time Princess Abc said: "No, we can't do this. That fight in the cave was a disaster. And you weren't even involved! I bet we would just stand in each others way."

“But the potential was there!”, I argued. “And I’m pretty sure you could teach me a thing or two.” With that I tried to reach her conscience, and even though she slightly turned away, her arms crossed before her chest, I was sure I saw a faint hint of red covering her face.

“Well, thank your for that, but I really am not a team-player.”

“That’s why you should accept!”, someone called out from afar. It was Shelly, she came from the principals office, apparently. She steadily walked up to us with pleased expression on her face.

“Hey, you two I just delivered the reports to the principal. She approved of them.”

“Wow, thank you very much.”, we both exclaimed.

“Why is there a police officer on school grounds ...”, a distraught Raynard mumbled behind us, which we happily ignored.

“I also wanted to inform you, that I’m also authorized as a supervisor for missions, so I decided to join you two on your next adventure.”

“Well, as I said, I am not-” Princess Abc was abruptly cut off by Shelly.

“I had a talk with the principal. She said, you’re not really a sociable person, and she fears that this might lead to some problems down the road. At first I found that statement odd. And I mean, yes, we barely know each other that well, but the way you and Nathan talked to each other, showed some ... weird chemistry.” Now it was my turn to turn bright red. At least I felt that way. I tried not to make it show on my face. “What I wanted to say by that is ... Princess Aurelia. I don’t know of any circumstances, that might have caused any anti-social behavior of sorts. So please don’t think that I pity you. I see it as my duty as an honorary teacher, to make sure that all students are at their best. Especially since you might have big shoe’s to fill one day, Princess.”

Out of the corner of my eye I could see Princess Abc clench her fists. That’s when suddenly Raynard chimed in, more energetic than before

“Me too!” That caused the princess to spin around in surprise. “I want to help too! I saw you sitting alone during lunch break a couple of times, even though you’re so popular and no-one holds a grudge against you. I always wondered why it was, that you seemed so lonely, while being surrounded by so many people, and I thought of talking to you, but was afraid because well ... you are the princess after all. But seeing you and Nathan talk so casually made me think, that there isn’t actually anything I should be afraid of. I mean who would you blame for wanting to be friends with someone.” Raynard stopped for a second to take a breath.

“So ... Princess Aurelia, would you like to be friends with me?” Marking the conclusion of his improvised friendship speech he stiffly threw his hand into Princess Abc’s direction. I was quite impressed by this sudden outburst, and so was the princess, stuttering a series of incomprehensible words after another. I quickly decided to break the tension.

“You can call her Princess Abc. It’s shorter.”

The princess shot me a glare of disbelief, before hitting my elbow in her rage. In that moment, it felt as if I was hit by thunder. I stumbled away, holding my elbow restraining a curse. She hit my funny bone.

I looked up, but tried not to be offended, even though Shelly was without a doubt laughing at me. That also seemed to tickle the princesses laugh box as she started giggling viciously.

Raynard simply was confused.

“I’m sorry.”, she said wiping a tear from her eye and giving me her hand in apology which I accepted. Seeing that Raynard was just about to remove his hand from the position it had occupied not so long ago, she offered him her other hand. He too grabbed it hesitantly.

“Okay ... with that I guess, we’re a team!”, she said.

“What?”, it just slipped out of my mouth.

“Any complaints?”

“No, it’s just ... unexpected, but we’re a team now, okay.” A weird satisfied huff escaped my lips after that realization.

“Perfect, because I just found the ideal mission for you guys.” This came from Shelly who appeared to have changed her position without us noticing. She now was standing in front of the board, and took off one of the posters containing a short description for a mission.

“Type: crime investigation, Location: Village Crema, Blackwood Forest. Investigate the disappearance of several corpses from the villages ... graveyard?” Raynard, who was reading the job description, had a voice crack near the end of the sentence. I’m glad that he spared me from the embarrassment of having that happen to my voice. Normally I would not be freaked out by something like that, but whatever was happening in that village, I was sure, this was the real deal. I could only imagine what kind of satanic rituals people would do in our world, but in this world it probably won’t take long for me to find out exactly that.

“A quest about missing corpses?” The Scepticism in Princess Abc’s voice was unmistakable. “Well, we already solved one theft, why not solve another?”

“That’s a way to put it ...”, I muttered.

“So, what do you think?”, Shelly asked.

“I mean, I wouldn’t have any viable arguments against it ...”, I said.

“Sound fishy, but okay, let’s do this.”, Princess Abc agreed.

Raynard only gave a silent nod.

“Well in that case, I’ll take that to the principal’s so she can send the message ahead, that we’ll be coming as soon as possible.” Shelly took the paper and rolled it up. “You should pack your things, we might set out tomorrow.” Just as she added that something sent the quest board flying. It smashed against the opposite wall with a loud thud, that made everyone flinch.

“I heard everything, and I won’t let the master go without me!” It was Raven.

“A- An Incubus?” Without a doubt, Raynard just couldn’t pull himself together.

“Yes, he is my ... you know what, I don’t even know what this is anymore, but it doesn’t feel wrong.”

“An Incubus?”, he repeated. “In our school?”

“It’s more likely than you think.”

“I’m sorry Raven, but you can’t come with us.”

“Actually Shelly-”

“No. You. Can’t. This is a students-only event. Go home.”

Raven’s shoulders drooped and he went for the exit in a sulking manner. But as he walked past me, his mood immediately brightened and he said: “Don’t worry honey, I’ll find a way.” He kissed my cheek, and after that he left cheerily and without any complaint. That little peck though sent shivers all over my body.

“Ugh, what did we get ourselves into.”, Shelly complained on the other hand, brushing through her short her with her hand. “Whatever, I’ll bring this to the principal, pack your things, and, ugh, Nathan? Make sure I’ll never see that weirdo ago. He is a criminal, jeez!”

“You surely are an interesting lot.”, Raynard said a lot paler than normal.

Chapter 12 – In which there is a lot of shouting

Part 1

The next day we met in front of the academy. Even though I had a room there I spent this night at the mansion, since I needed to pack my things. But, to be honest? There weren't a lot of things I actually possessed. I only had the clothing I was wearing at the moment, and maybe some books from the mansion, so when I turned up at our meeting point I had nothing with me.

“What? Why do you not have a bag?”, the princess asked as soon as I arrived at the academy.

“Well, what should I have brought with me? I literally don't have any possession- oh wait, yes I do, but that thing is under police custody.”

I was of course talking about the grimoire. Luckily Raynard had yet to arrive, so I would at least not have to explain that whole conversation to him.

“What have you brought with you anyway? I thought the academy was covering food expenses and the like?”, I retorted.

Princess Abc stared at nothing for a moment and then replied “Womanly stuff for women.” with a telling expression. I think I got the gist of what she was trying to tell me, so I nodded knowingly.

“But yeah, other than that, the academy is awfully generous.”, she admitted.

Thing was not only was the grimoire my only possession, it also was capable of storing any item I imagined. So even if I had any items with me, I would not store them inside a bag, but whatever sort of micro-dimension my grimoire had created.

I wonder if I could just store my friends inside my grimoire Pokèmon-Style I mused while the princess placed her handy bag in front of her feet. Of course she was wearing the uniform of the academy, which I still had to receive. It's bright colors weirdly contrasted her brown hair and dark mitts.

“Maybe you should just ask Shelly about your grimoire, last I heard investigations on this case were closed, so there shouldn't be any problem. Although it seems a bit off, that they would just let the only user of a grimoire in the world walk around like that.”

“Yeah, about that ... what exactly is the sitch with grimoires in general?”, I asked.

“What's the what now?” The princess was visibly confused.

“The um, deal ... with the grimoire.” *I should definitely try to tone down the pop culture references a bit.*

But before she was able to answer, Raynard approached us with a cheerful “Helloho~” and after a short sprint he came to a halt right in front of us.

“Are ya'll ready for our first adventure as a team?” He sounded like an infomercial host, way to confident about his product for it to be any good.

...

Well considering his initial lack of enthusiasm for this mission, this was pretty much the case.

After a couple of seconds of awkward silence, Raynard exclaimed “Okay, let's hope Shelly arrives soon, because I might leave out of panic” with the same fake enthusiasm as before. Princess Abc desperately shook her head.

After a short while we heard hooves in the distance getting louder and louder, until we saw a carriage appear at the end of the street. It halted in front of the entrance where we stood.

“Have any of you ordered a carriage to bring you to the village Crema?!”, an elderly woman shouted. She was sitting on the front part of the carriage, holding reins.

“Probably?”, I said with a mildly confused expression on my face. Shelly probably had ordered the carriage for us but she was nowhere to be seen. *Why a carriage? I thought cars were a thing in this world?*

“Excuse me?!”, she shouted, leaning towards our general direction.

“Oh no, she’s deaf.”, Raynard said, his expression growing more and more tired.

“Yes, but we are not yet complete!”, the princess shouted back.

“WHAT?”

“WE ARE NOT YET COMPLE- BLEGH” The princess suddenly started coughing and tried to clean her throat as she tried to communicate with the woman.

“LISTEN IF YOU WANT TO THE VILLAGE GET YOUR ASSES UP HERE. MY HEARING IS NOT THE BEST, AND IF YOU START NAGGING, I’LL JUST DRIVE AWAY AND TAKE YOUR PREPAYMENT WITH ME!”

“Alright!”, Raynard said, either intimidated or simply tired of this exchange he wasn’t even really part of. He started climbing up the back of the carriage when I said. “Take your time, if we stall a bit, Shelly might still make it.”

Princess Abc gave me an exasperated nod, and first threw her bag onto the carriage before proceeding to slowly climb onto the carriage herself. When I started getting onto the carriage I realized that this stalling strategy was not very effective, and as soon, as I took a place in the middle of the carriage, between Raynard and the princess, the old lady shouted “EVERYONE HOLD ON SOMEWHERE IT’S GONNA BE A ROCKY RIDE!” with which she took off at a speed horses should not be able to achieve in an instant.

Actually the departure was so sudden, I toppled over backwards, hitting my head on the wood.

“Ouch!”

I tried to hold my aching head while also trying to not hit myself somewhere else. I made an attempt at sitting up again, but decided that lying on my stomach was the best way to not fall off this hell ride. I looked outside the back of the carriage, only to realize that the bypassing scenery would make me sick, until we passed a side road in which I saw - Shelly!

We were just slow enough for me to recognize her and the panic on her face, as she tried to catch up to the carriage.

“WAIT FOR MEEEE!”, she shouted while sprinting at an amazing speed behind the carriage.

“I’M SORRY THE DRIVER CAN’T HEAR YOU!”, I shouted back at her.

“SOMEONE STOP THAT CARRIAGE!”, Shelly screamed in an exaggerated manner that caused a lot of heads to turn into our direction. We still were in the middle of the city after all.

“Isn’t that the officer?”, I thought I was able to hear through the road noise.

“Is she chasing that carriage?”

“Are they thieves on the run?”

“Oh my god, those are criminals?!”

And I soon realized that they were totally getting the wrong idea!

“WUAHAHAHA! YES FASTER MY BABYS!” The old hag shouted! I pitied the horses that probably endured this torture on a daily basis as long as they did not spontaneously break down. She seemed to enjoy this a lot, but knowing that she was hard of hearing I figured all of her senses must have gone numb with her age.

I crawled to the back end of the carriage and extended my arm towards the police woman hoping to heave her onto the vehicle. But I soon came to realize I did not think that idea through entirely. Because as soon as Shelly managed to grab my arm, it wasn't her that was drawn onto the carriage, but it was me that was drawn onto the road.

“WOAAAAH!”

My vocal chords were getting sore, but that was beside the point, as I realized my face was slowly approaching the pavement and the result of that would not be pretty. Just as I was about to have the most intense pain of my life I heard a weird noise of wood breaking coming from the carriage, followed by a high-pitched shriek from Raynard and someone shouting: “MASTER!”

Raven suddenly appeared below me, making me crash into him rather than the cold stone. I landed on top of him and we both then crashed into Shelly, who was behind us, still holding onto my arm. Dust blew up, as we rolled a couple of meters down the street, earning us a lot of bewildered looks from passerby's that were not quite sure whether they wanted to get involved with this entire situation.

“Ouch.” Shelly finally said, crushed below both me and Raven.

“What was that?”, I asked trying to stand up, even though pretty much every inch of my body was hurting.

“You're one to ask.”, Shelly managed to squeeze out, before saying “Get off of me!” to Raven, who quickly got up, just to check me in an exaggerated manner.

“Master, are you all right?”, he said while slowly patting my everywhere. He managed to hit all the places that hurt the most causing me to flinch.

“Cut it out!”

“Okay, what exactly happened?” I turned around to Shelly, who was now standing and stretching herself. I was just about to reply, when a loud honk made us all jump.

“Get off the damn road ya moron's or I'll call the police!”, an angry man shouted in a dialect from the car behind us.

“I am the police!”, Shelly shouted back, but prompted us to leave the road.

“First of all, why a carriage? Why not a car? That old lady is crazy, she's torturing her horses, and on top of that my butt hurts and I've only been driving for a minute. I'm not going to survive this ride.”

Shelly tried to speak up, but I wasn't finished yet.

“Second of all, what are you doing here Raven? Where did you come from? I thought you weren't allowed on this mission?”

“Okayokayokay”, Shelly was the first to respond. “This woman is literally the fastest cart driver in the history of the entire world, we would only take two days, instead of four, if we took her. And Raven, I am also really eager to hear what you have to say to all of this?” With that she crossed her arms in front of her and gave Raven a critical look.

“Obviously this mission is going to be dangerous!” Raven explained. “And I am not willing to let my master” – “Don't call me that.” – “be exposed to such a danger. That's why I hid inside a crate to be able to check on his well-being.”

Part 2

“Wow, this mission is already a disaster and it has not even started yet, ugh.” Shelly turned around and made an exhausted nod. “Worst of all, that carriage is probably already out of town, and we have no idea where! And even if, we would not be able to reach it!”

“Umm, I might be able to help.”, Raven suggested.

Shelly turned back with a questioning look.

“If master gives me his power, I might be able to catch up.”

“But we still have no idea where that carriage is and also ...”, Shelly did not finish her sentence but I was pretty sure, she was thinking about the fact that Raven wasn’t supposed to be here.

“Why were you late anyway?”, I asked her. “All of that would not have happened!”

“I was at the police station picking up your ... book.”, she said, pointing at her backpack.

[Please tell her that I am not a book.]

“Um, I’m supposed to tell you that it is not a book.”

“Obviously, but those things are rare, I can’t just announce we have this thing in broad ... Wait why are you supposed to say that?”

“Oh, the grimoire told me to tell you.”, I replied totally ignoring her concerns. No-one would be eavesdropping on us, I thought.

“You can talk to it? It can talk to you? What exactly is that thing really?”

[I am a grimoire that contains all knowledge of this world.]

“It says it contains ... oh my god.” I clasped my hands together as I suddenly realized something.

You don’t happen to know where that carriage is, we were chasing don’t you?

[It is precisely at that location.]

An image of the carriage chasing over a field flashed through my mind.

“Oh my god, that is so OP ...” I muttered to myself.

“It’s what now?”

“Nevermind, Shelly give me that grimoire.”

Hesitantly she took her backpack off her back, opened it and handed me the grimoire from the inside.

Can you draw me a map that shows our position relatively to the position of the carriage?

As soon as I opened a random page its contents were replaced with an accurate map showing the city and it’s outskirts, as well as our position and that of the carriage signified through differently colored dots.

Satisfied with the result I turned the grimoire around to show it to Raven and Shelly.

“Woah, that thing seriously is amazing!” Shelly exclaimed.

“Well then, should we get going?” Raven asked impatiently.

“Okay but how do you plan to get us both to the carriage?”, she asked him.

“You climb onto my back, and I’ll hold the master on my arms.” he said as he lifted me off the ground planting a long kiss onto my lips. I felt my cheeks heat up due to this unexpected contact.

He moaned softly after our lips parted and then called out to Shelly: “Get up and hold on tight, the headwind might blow you off my back.”

I felt how he had to adjust to the additional weight, as Shelly climbed onto Raven’s back, and after he said something along the lines of “Here we go!”, he took off and we started screaming – again.

And it wasn’t only us, it also was the dozens of people that were walking on the street, that Raven miraculously managed to avoid hitting at hundreds of miles per hour.

“Raven!”, Shelly attempted to communicate with him. “Get off the streets!”

“How should I do that?”, he retorted.

“Doesn’t lending Nathan’s powers give you the ability to fly or something?!”

“No, but I can jump!”

“Whaaa-?!”, I tried to say.

And lord, that was a jump.

He leapt into the air, releasing a shockwave from the force of his jump and soaring through the sky somehow managed to maneuver himself onto a nearby rooftop.

“Woah!” I let out an uncontrolled shout, as he lowered his body to put a damper on his landing, which meant my body that was still in his arms nearly scratched the surface. Barely having made a secure landing he already dashed off, leaving behind a dust-cloud on the roof that probably no-one had set a foot on for the last years. The roof tiles rattle under his footsteps and where probably audible inside the building itself.

A truly taxing day for the citizens of Ataraxia.

He leapt over each rooftop like a flying ninja and after a short while we reached the city walls, where guards were waving through unknowing citizens, until one of them spotted us and shouted: “In- um, extruders!” Upon which every single one of them turned their heads up in the air.

Is this what it’s like fleeing Mexico?, I wondered.

I spotted several guards readying their canons and magic wands or other objects when we landed on the roof and tried to warn Raven, but Shelly was faster than me.

“Stop!”, she shouted, very unconvincingly trying to assure her subordinates everything was alright. But the result was ...

“Isn’t that the boss?!”

“Oh my god is she being kidnapped?!”

I did not even bother to sigh anymore, as Raven propelled himself into the air again.

“FIRE!”, I heard someone shout behind me and prayed that we did not just cause a war by accident. When I took a peak behind Raven’s back I saw a couple of trails left behind by projectiles aimed at us.

“Dodge!”

As soon as I said that, Raven did a barrel roll to the side, evading the first incoming attack, and another three, while slowly losing altitude. He finished his last rotation shortly before coming down onto the ground. The last few projectiles hit the area around us and after taking a couple of great strides, the guards on the city wall slowly disappeared in the distance and we from their view.

“I’ll have to explain **all of that** to my superiors!”, Shelly snapped.

“Show me the map again, master.”, Raven said, completely ignoring Shelly’s looming rage.

I realized that my arms were clung around the grimoire the entire time. I somehow managed to open the map against the wind and hold it so Raven was able to look at it. He speeded in between some corn fields not noticing the distressed farmers fearing for their crops.

“Okay, we should make it soon, just another couple of minutes, I guess.”, Raven said.

After leaving the corn fields behind I was able to spot the carriage in the distance.

“There they are!”, I exclaimed pointing towards them and closing my grimoire.

Even from that distance I could see that they were moving at an amazing speed, but we slowly but surely managed to catch up. I could see Raynard and the princess inside the vehicle desperately trying to not fall off, but nearly losing their grip as they saw Raven approaching.

Only a couple of steps away, Raven took one final leap, and rolled inside the carriage as jumping into a driving vehicle caused him to lose his balance.

“A SUCCUBUS?!” I heard Raynard scream.

I collided with the back of the old cart driver, prompting her to turn around.

“OH YOU’RE BACK ALREADY?!”

“Ugh, shut up.”, I told that lady.

“I HEARD THAT!”

“Of course she did ... Hi.”, I said to Princess Abc and Raynard who were both looking at me in complete bewilderment.

Raynard tried to say something but just ended up pointing between me, Shelly, who was just getting up, and Raven who laid on my lap hugging my stomach. My grimoire landed somewhere in the corner.

“Did I do it?” Raven suddenly said, and gave me an excited look like a puppy. If only he had a tail he could wag.

“Yes ... yes you did it.”, I said and reluctantly petted his red hair.

“Ugh that report is going to be a lot.”, Shelly muttered while rubbing her face. For some reason she managed to stay upright, while the others were still clinging to the bars holding this thing together. Scattered across the wooden floor also were the remains of the wooden crate Raven was supposedly hiding in. What a miracle I haven’t gotten a splinter.

“So, we are now all set?”, the princess asked no-one specifically.

“Actually we’re more than set, considering Raven shouldn’t even be here”, Shelly said.

“But we can’t just throw him out, can we?” I tried to put in a good word for the weird Incubus that got a little too attached to me.

“You can’t.”, he agreed trying to nod convincingly.

“As long as you don’t interfere with the mission, it’ll be fine I guess. Still that report is going to be a nightmare.”

“I’m going to protect you.” Raven said lowering his voice seductively.

“Yeah you do you.”

“So, how long is that journey going to take?”, the princess asked.

“Around two days. Crema is located south-east of our city, halfway to the kingdom’s border. So lay back, it’s going to be a long two days.”

Shelly took the words right out of my mouth.

Chapter 13 – Bonding time on the bumpy road to Crema

Being stuck on a carriage on a journey to a new (first) adventure with a band of misfits? That calls for bonding time!

What dark secrets may loom over us?

What hidden past are my companions hiding from me?

As I mused about how to break the awkward silence that was only interrupted every now and then by the clattering cart and the maniacal laughter of the old lady who tried to dissolve the very laws of physics, I came to realize, that I might be the only person to be really hiding anything at all.

I mean sure, a princess certainly had a couple of skeletons in her closet.

And there had to be a reason Raynard was so wary of ... well everything it seemed.

I was leaning against the back corner of the cart, brushing my hand against the grimoire hidden behind my body.

I think I should just be transparent about this thing. I thought. I mean it's just a book, how much havoc could it wreak if Raynard knew about it? I get that there's people like Ebony that would be after it, but I think I can trust him? I mean I've only known him for a day, but he is kinda sweet actually, and if we want to work as a team, we should be honest with each other.

[Beside the fact that I am not a mere book ...]

Shut it!

I flinched at this sudden remark. I was so lost in my thoughts I totally forgot I was sharing them with someone.

The princess, who was actually buried in a book she had brought along raised an eyebrow at me, but I simply waved both of my hands reassuringly.

[Dare I say, I might have some thoughts on this matter?]

The fact that you seem to gain more and more of a will scares me, but go on.

[It is one of my duties to solve any problem that might bother the one who bound me.]

[After all, if the one who bound me ceases to function properly I too will cease function.]

So what you're saying is, you're willing to help me as long as it benefits you? What the hell are you even?

[I am a grimoire.]

...

You really aren't a big talker. But okay, if you have a solution to this "problem", speak.

[I agree that it would be best for your teammates to know of my existence.]

[I also agree that you should not reveal my existence recklessly.]

[Thus I have a proposal.]

[I disguise myself as a wand.]

[I have the ability to change my appearance.]

[I will make myself look like a book, that is used to channel magic energy.]

I needed a couple of seconds to fully understand what the grimoire meant by this. But then I remembered the city guard I saw a couple of days ago, that channeled his mana inside his brass knuckles.

Same thing, huh?

[You would have to convince everyone that you use me as a wand.]

[That way, you would be allowed to take me anywhere without anyone really questioning it.]

Having a book as a wand would still be on the unusual side of things though ... but what else is there to do. Okay, I guess it's settled then.

I took the grimoire from behind my back and put it on my lap.

Do whatever you see fit.

And with that the grimoire changed its appearance in front of my eyes. The weird symbol on the cover disappeared and what was left, was a plain brown leather cover.

“Okay, so ... maybe we should talk?” I said squinting my eyes lightly, still not quite sure of myself. The heads of four other people turned my direction.

“What about?”, the princess asked.

“Well, I think it would be best for everyone here to be on the same page about everything. Raynard, I have no idea what exactly that's supposed to mean, but this is a grimoire.”, I said, showing the grimoire in his direction.

“Wait you can't just blurt it out like that!”, Shelly who appeared to be asleep suddenly shouted.

“I'm sorry, but if we want to work as a team, we should be open about it. Besides trying to hide it would just result in a lot of awkward situations ... and possibly **death**.” I emphasized that last word because why not.

“Yeah right.” He squinted his eyes. “Grimoires definitely look different.”, he then added. Why Shelly's reaction did not prompt him to believe me immediately was beyond me.

“Oh of course.” I immediately took a look at the *totally normal book* in my hands, and commanded it to turn back into its original form.

“Oh my ...” Raynard's eyes widened as he witnessed the magic. “Was that some kind of illusion spell? Must be an advanced one, I don't remember learning anything like this during my first two years.”

I shook my head in exaggerated desperation. “No it's not, it is a grimoire, just like I told you.”

“... Can I take a closer look?”, he then asked leaning over towards me.

I crawled over to him and handed the grimoire over to him. He took it and first swept across the cover with his right hand, and then proceeded to do the same thing to examine the back.

“Can I look inside?”, he asked.

“I think that falls under taking a closer look.” I chuckled.

He just tilted his head in response.

“Umm, that means yes, you can look inside.”

He opened the first page stared at it for a couple of seconds and then said: “I don't understand a thing.”

I just let out a confused “Huh?” and then took a look at the page he wasn't able to read.

“Oh, it says ‘This Grimoire has established a bond with: Nathan’.”

“Wait a second.”, he exclaimed. “You can read that gibberish? Or are just kidding?”

“What of course I can read it! Is the literacy rate in this world that low?”

Princess Abc also joined our circle and took a look at the page my name was written and then said: “Sorry to break it to you Nathan, but that is definitely not a writing system that is used in our kingdom. Or in any kingdom actually. Maybe it's the writing used on the Isles of Beast to the west of Lectus Dei, but I highly doubt it.”

“No it’s not.” Raynard slowly voiced his opinion. “I know that scripture, I think it’s some ancient language, that has been lost over the centuries.” He sheepishly looked up and continued. “Um, my older brother is a historian, and I’ve read quite a few of his works on grimoires. He’s still in the middle of researching this ancient language ... but Nathan!” He suddenly faced me. “You can read this, can’t you?”

“Yeees?” I did not like the way he said this.

“You could be an important asset in my brother’s research and-”

“Nope!” Shelly who observed this conversation from afar suddenly cut him off. “Nathan, this is exactly why I wanted to keep this a secret.” She suddenly stood up, managing to maintain her balance for some reason.

I did not know how to respond to this. I knew where she was coming from, but still I stuck to my opinion.

“I mean you are the reason, we are in this situation, aren’t you?”, Princess Abc suddenly accused Shelly. “After all, you told us to form a team.”

Wow, does she finally abuse her status as a princess? Wonderful!

Although she was not quite in the right I appreciated her trying to defend me.

“Besides I think Nathan is right. It’s best for everyone to know what’s up.”

“I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have suggested something like this.” Raynard responded with his head hanging down, and returned the grimoire.

“No, it’s alright ...”, I tried to cheer him up. He really was overapologetic.

Shelly was still standing sporting an annoying look on her face that was directed at our group. Suddenly Raven was hanging over my shoulder.

“I don’t really get what’s going on, but I don’t like the way you look at my master.”, he said in a threatening tone. I imagined he was thinking about how to kill her most effectively, and it made me smile for some reason.

“Woah, where did you come from?”, Raynard flinched and it felt like he cleared a hundred meters in a second.

“I was flying around enjoying the view, when I felt my masters unease suddenly.”, Raven responded over my shoulder.

“I- uh ...” Raynard made some indecipherable stutters, until I motioned Raven to back away a bit.

“Raynard are you afraid of Raven?” It was obvious. I mean who am I to speak, I am inept of reading facial expressions a lot of times, but Raynard seemed like an open book to me.

He sighed.

“Ugh, it’s not him. It’s ... he’s an Incubus, right?”, he said maybe a bit too loud.

“Go on.”, Princess Abc said, after I remained silent.

“Thing is ... I ... The town I’m from, has a bit of a strained relationship with your kind.”, he now said, directly to Raven. “There was this group of outlaws a couple of years ago, mostly made of Succubi and Incubi. Back then they targeted our town, because we were rather prosperous compared to other towns nearby. I-” His voice suddenly cracked, and his mouth motioned trying to find his words, until Princess Abc suddenly joined us and gently put a hand on his lap.

“Are you all right?”, she asked him. “You don’t have to talk if you don’t want to. We understand.” She glanced sideways towards me.

“Y- Yeah. I’m sorry for making you do this.”, I suddenly felt the need to apologize even though I did nothing wrong. But the way she looked at me worked like magic.

“N-No it’s not your fault.”, Raynard suddenly looked me in the eye. “I’m sorry, it’s just- every time I see him, I see images of back then, and I feel like ... crawling into a corner and staying there until ... I’m sorry, it’s really not your fault, I’m just ... stupid.” He gave us a bitter laugh, and I gave him a bitter yet sympathetic smile.

“You’re not stupid.”, the princess said on the contrary. “You’re brave. You must have carried this with you for a long time. And I bet it hurt. But you survived. You’re fantastic.” Now she smiled too. “Also I think you scored better than me on the last test.” That last sentence sounded rather mischievous.

“Haha, no way, the princess not being number one? Shelly you were right, nobles are spoiled these days.” I called out to her, remembering what she said the other day. Her face had no traces of anger left.

“You said what?!”, the princess exclaimed raising furiously from her squatting position, only to stumble back onto her behind. Raynard caught her back with an extended arm saving the princess from falling off the carriage.

“Please, don’t tell me it’s not true.”, she replied deadpan.

“No you’re right, but I really don’t want to be compared to my useless cousins for example. So glad they don’t go to Ataraxia, their presence would embarrass me the entire time.” She shook her head in desperation.

Of course, what would royalty be without thousands of cousins to marry.

We actually came to enjoy this ride a lot more, than we initially thought. The awkward silence had long passed, and the princess, Raynard and I ended up sharing a lot of stuff. Although I avoided telling him that I am from another world. He would have labeled me as a lunatic. I also avoided making up some bullshit excuse like having memory loss or anything, because that would have caused problem in the long run.

Instead I just talked about my past, like everyone else, but avoided speaking about stuff like any kind of technology, for hopefully obvious reasons.

My past ...

It’s already been a few days ...

My though process was interrupted by the sudden halt of the carriage, that made us all tumble forward and onto each other. Not even Shelly was standing where she was anymore.

“What’s the meaning of this?” Shelly asked, supporting herself on her arms. “Why are we standing?”

“THE HORSES NEED TO SLEEP!” The crazy lady shouted. “GOOD NIGHT!” And with that she went completely limp and proceeded to snore at least as loudly as she was talking.

I took a look outside and only then realized that the sun had already set.

We untangled ourselves and looked at Shelly expectantly.

“What, I didn’t know, we would halt.”

“I mean, thinking about it, it does make a lot of sense ...”, the princess said, lamenting her own stupidity it seemed.

We just grinned at each other and then set up a camp for the night.

Chapter 14 – I spent the night talking with a book.

[I am a grimoire.]

Excuse me.

Getting used to this kind of conversation really was something ...

Anyway, for some reason, that may or may not be connected to my tragic back story™, I decided to not sleep that night.

At least for now.

At least until I had figured out, how leveling up in this world works exactly.

[You level up by collecting experience.]

[Though a leveling system does not exactly exist, I figured it would be the most understandable way for you to let your overall power be compared with others.]

That is kinda weird, but thank you for being considerate, I guess?

[It was a pleasure to do so, master.]

Oh no, did I get myself another servant?

[Oh, but master, I'd prefer if you'd call me your maid uwu ($\cong \nabla \leq *$)]

Wha- what's that all of a sudden.

[I am just trying to keep the male/female ratio accordingly to certain people's needs.]

Only two genders? As a Gen-Zer I consider myself disappointed.

[My humblest apologies master ($\cong \succ \dots \leftarrow \cong$) should I change your registered gender?]

Do as you see fit.

[Gender >>disappointed<< confirmed.]

Back from tasteless jokes, to the important matter, that's at hand here ... I have a "level" and "experience points", how exactly do they work?

[While you have a level you don't have experience points.]

[You only have experience, that can't be measured as a number.]

[Through these experiences you change which affects certain stats.]

So, right now, I am level 2, right?

[Precisely.]

What was the cause for my level up?

[Your battle in the underground chamber with the succubus, as well as exposure to magic counted as accumulating experience.]

I did not do anything useful though ...

[Your health has increased and you've gained the ability to learn spells.]

Okay, stop. While I'm really excited to cast magic myself, I have to file a complaint with the developer already. You can't just measure health as a number, can you? I won't lose HP, if someone blows me up, I'll die!

[In that case your health would decrease by 105 points.]

And if I had 1000 points, I would still lose them all, right?

[Correct.]

See, that's why it doesn't make any sense, measuring my health as an absolute number, rather than a percentage.

[Incorrect.]

[This has to do with the way magic works for you.]

[Spells use up a certain amount of energy.]

[That energy is your blood.]

[By accumulating experience, you have also raised your blood reproduction by a certain degree, thus allowing you to now safely use the lowest class spells.]

Wait, stop. Again. So you're telling me that theoretically I can use any spell, that you know, but if I use something that needs more energy, than I can provide ... what happens then?

[You die.]

Of course there's a catch.

But then I suddenly remembered a conversation with Aster about his eyes, and how they use to much mana.

Why can't I use mana for my spells?

[You don't have a mana circulation.]

I... do not?

[That's because you're human.]

Of course I am human, what else am I supposed to be?

[A anthromagi like your friends for example.]

What? What's the difference between the two?

[Error.]

Error?

[Error.]

Are you serious now?

It took me a lot of energy not to shout that out loud. In fact I did not even realize, that I jolted upward. A omniscient grimoire? Bullshit! Why can't it tell me about the most basic information?

“You can't sleep?”

I jumped forward, not having expected someone talking to me all of a sudden.

“Princess?” The princess suddenly approached me from where everyone else was sleeping. We pretty much stopped in the middle of nowhere due to the old lady's weird ways. While the cart was standing on the road, where it halted, we decided to move into the field a bit. The princess used her fire magic to burn the grass creating a clearing where it would be safe for us to make a camp fire. She had great control over her power it seemed.

“Please don't call me that.” She sighed and then stopped next to me. I was standing further into the field, having leant against a tree, until a minute ago or so.

“What should I call you then?” I could not entire make out the features of her face. Only after concentrating for a couple of seconds it seemed as if the moonlight got bright enough.

“By my name?” She paused. “I don't know my friends call me Aurie. But that's weird isn't it?”

“No it isn't?”

Not having a nickname at all is.

“I'll call you Aurelia then.”

“Alright.” She moved past me, letting herself slide down against the tree. I followed suit.

“What were you doing?”

“Oh, you know, just talking to my b- grimoire.”

“So, what did it say?”

I thought about some witty answer for a second, but decided to simply tell her the truth.

“Error.”, I said and tried not to sound too bitter.

“Error?”, She repeated.

“Well, after asking it what the key difference between a human and a ‘anthromagi’ was” (Yes I put that in quotation marks) “it just said error. So much for ‘I contain all knowledge of the world.’”

“You were looking for information about humanity?”

“Well, obviously since I am human and you are not, and there seems to be some difference, although we both look pretty much the same ...”

“Interestingly I’ve been also doing some research. Well, at least I hoped one of the books I took with me would have some information on that.”

“Oh, so that’s what you were reading?”

“Yes. You know after that whole fight with Ebony I got interested, and ordered some books from the state library.”

“You actually have books on that? I tried bribing the library of Dementia Mansion – it’s collection is huge – but that turned out not to be too much.”

“Yeah, all the reading so far pretty much amounted to nothing. It’s so incredibly weird, because look: the key difference, and as far as I am concerned only difference between the humans and the anthromagi is that the latter have what is called a mana circulation parallel to their blood circulation-”

“I know about that ...”

“But humans don’t. Haven’t had. Because they are extinct. But the weirdest thing is, I can’t find anything on that. No history books, research papers whatever. It is something that appears to be common knowledge, but is not documented whatsoever. Their have been publications talking about ... some sort of ancient civilization, but the word human is not once used. Oh, in fact, the one I was reading today was written by Raynard’s brother.” She giggled a little, probably to drown out the serious aura, that was emanating from what she said.

“Was it any helpful?”

“No, not really. It was some sort of history book, honestly much better than the ones used at Ataraxia. Actually, let me grab it real quick. You might want to get a grasp on what our world is like.”

She quickly stood up and I tried not to pay any attention to her skirt, that was positioned a bit above. Luckily she then quickly jogged away to our campsite before returning, holding the book with both of her arms.

It was what you expected a history book to look like, thicker than the bible, a generic leather binding. She sat next to me and spread the book between our legs so we could each look inside. Only problem was that it was a bit too dark for reading, which she also realized.

“Oh let me just use some ... no wait. I have never seen **you** cast a spell.” She said.

“Well, I’m still trying to figure things out ...”

“Have you ever cast a spell?”

“That was actually what I was talking about with the grimoire earlier.”

I took the grimoire, that was just carelessly thrown onto the ground earlier. I opened it but wasn’t quite sure what to search for.

“What kind of spell, do you want me to look for?” I asked the princess.

“Actually I was thinking about just explaining to you how it would work, but ... can you really just look it up in that thing?”

“I don’t know, I’ve never done it before.”

“Well, the spell I was thinking of is called *luminae*. It’s a spell to create a sphere of light.”

Luminae ...

Suddenly the page I had randomly opened first turned blank, before ink blots started appearing and spreading over the page, forming words, and finally resulting in what appeared to be the spell *Luminae*, with a short description, and how much mana it used. The princess of course wasn’t able to read it. I proceeded to read through the entire page, that gave me a detailed explanation on how to use the spell. It sounded a bit esoteric, I had to concentrate my energy onto my finger tips, until ...

“Woah, you did it!” The princess suddenly exclaimed.

“I did not even realize it!”

The tip of my index finger glowed, and we both looked at it in awe, even though for her it probably wasn’t the first time seeing someone use that spell.

Well, that was easier than I thought.

[You could have also downloaded the information directly into your mind, without having to read the entire page.]

“I could have done that?”

“What?”, the princess responded.

“Oh, I was talking to the grimoire. It told me that I could have downloaded the entire page about the spell into my mind.”

“... downloaded ...?”

Oops, I did not think about the possibility of her not understanding my vocabulary again ...

“Um, does ‘save’ work for you?”

“Ah, now I understand. Anyway, now let’s take a look at this.” She said, tapping on the first opened page of the history book with her index finger.

“It is chronologically sorted, and thus begins with the creation of our world by the gods. Well, most people don’t actually believe in the work of gods anymore, but no one really has any explanation for how the world came to be either.”

I thought about how my world was supposedly created by the big bang, and I was thinking about telling her about it for a second. Eh, why the hell not.

“People in my world actually used to believe gods were the reason for everything too.”

“And now?”

“They don’t, but they aren’t quite sure how our world works either.”

We shared a laugh, before returning to the book and her ... Aurelia talking to me about god, the world, and everything else we deemed insignificant at the time.

Chapter 15 – A village near an easily inflammable forest? What could possibly go wrong!

My back hurts and the way this crazy lunatic was driving did not help at all.

The princess ... Aurelia and I fell asleep, while reading last night. Problem is, that we were sitting and leaning against a tree, which is not the most comfortable position to sleep in.

We also leaned against each other which was a reason for awkwardness, when the others found us like that, after waking up.

Please fill in various comments on how adorable we were as much as you like.

“WE’RE HERE!”

“Thank fucking god.”

The cart came to a sudden halt, accompanied by exclamations of varying degrees of profanity.

I don’t exactly know why I expected to be standing in front of a gate, but there was none, and so I was disappointed. The only thing resembling some sort of border to separate the village from the “outside world” was a bridge leading across a small river.

The village itself wasn’t that big, it really was a village. I imagine if addresses were a concept utilized in this world, each of the houses’ address would probably be “Crema” and then a number after that.

Or are addresses a concept in this world?

Clearly I should pay more attention to my surroundings.

The trick is to describe just enough so everyone gets a good grasp at how everything looks, while not boring them with every minute detail.

Anyway, completely ignoring the complex infrastructure of this ... outpost of the human race, we got out of the cart trying to look all cool and heroic despite the pain of having hit every single inside surface of the cart, with every inch of our bodies.

Shelly in the meantime was discussing something with the old crazy lady, when Raynard asked: “Is that Blackwood Forest?”, while pointing at what was undoubtedly Blackwood forest.

“That undoubtedly is Blackwood Forest.”, Aurelia replied.

“Doesn’t seem too black for me.”

“It’s made out of wood.”, I chimed in, earning confused looks from both of them. What even was this conversation.

“Truth be told, I didn’t think when it said near the forest, it meant ... that close.”, I added.

The forest was actually stretching into the village, with a lot of branches hanging over some of the houses. It was as if the village made a small dent into the border of the forest.

“In this area summers are rather hot. Sure hope, they don’t have a problem with forest fires.”, Shelly said, after joining us.

“FOREST FIRE!” Someone shouted off in the distance.

“Should we do something?”, I asked. *We* excluding *myself* in this case.

“Let’s go!”, Aurelia exclaimed, *let’s* undoubtedly including *myself*.

She crossed the bridge and everyone else followed suit. We ran along the edge of the village to the general direction of the forest, until we could see the smoke rising not too far from us. We came across a few panicked townspeople desperately trying to get water from the river to where the fire was. They weren’t very successful.

The fire thankfully wasn't too deep into the forest, while at the same time not being near any building. Around what appeared to be a cemetery grass was burnt down leaving an interesting smell followed by a couple of half burned bushes.

"Okay, I think I got this.", Aurelia said, throwing her bag to the side.

She took a fighting stance and began to box the air between herself and the burning bushes which would have looked ridiculous, if it wasn't for the fact, that she seemed to punch water out of thin air. Actually I think that was exactly what she was doing.

Raynard seemed similarly confused to myself, but he did not have the audacity to ask what was going on, so I did it instead.

"Shelly, is she actually punching the humidity out of the air?", I voiced my theory.

"Oh, yes that is what she's doing. Phew, I though I would have to explain it to you, but you seem to be rather perceptive."

"Does that even make sense?"

"Why wouldn't it?"

"Oh sorry, different world, different standards. Humidity does not exist in my world."

"Oh, what a shame, so water magic is rather difficult, right?", Raynard said.

r/woosh

"Anyway," I turned to Aurelia, "do you need any help, or...?"

"No, don't worry. I got this. At least now I get around to doing my daily training."

"Don't worry, I take it from here!", another voice exclaimed from somewhere behind us.

A short-haired girl, wearing pants, maybe a bit older than us, came running from one of the buildings behind us. At first glance you wouldn't probably consider her to be pretty, at least I needed a bit to realize, that she was simply beautiful in a natural way, that would never find it's way onto a playboy cover.

I wonder if those ... Nevermind!

Blood drained from my face, when an image most would not consider suitable for public display appeared in my inner eye. Even though there was basically no connection between those two, I probably would never be able to look at that girl normally again.

She came to a halt, only a few steps short of reaching our group. I noticed she was wearing gloves for some reason, when she spread out her arms in front of her. Her body began trembling, and that was when Aurelia also noticed her presence. I tried figuring out what she was doing, when I realized, that her gloves dampened. It took not long after that for drops falling out of the sky.

It began raining.

At first the fire did not seem to recede, but that was because the rain was spread over the entire village. The girl did a few motions with her hands that reminded me of waterbending, after which the rain concentrated around the trees that were still on fire and it started to look more like a waterfall rather than simply rain.

Several townspeople started gathering around our group not minding the rain at first.

The girl ended the rain simply by putting her arms to her sides, after the fire was put out.

And then everyone clapped.

Yeah.

That happened.

"Wow, of course Misha did it again!"

“Thank god for this blessed child!”

Though I still wasn't sure whether that Misha-girl was an outstanding magician, or every one else simply sucked. I didn't have any comparison yet.

Hey, could I have done that thing?

[You would have died of mana loss before extinguishing the fire.]

Well, that's good to know.

“Hey, Shelly, do you really think, it was a good idea to take me along?”

“Yeah no need for an inferiority complex, I think she's at a pretty advanced level. Also she definitely is older than you. Wonder how she did learn that, out here ...”

I turned back to face that girl, Misha, to take a closer look at her, but Aurelia was just one step ahead, and was already approaching here.

“Wow, that was certainly impressive.”, she said.

Misha turned around and took a step forward while saying “Thank you, you're moves were also pretty darn cool.” She staggered a bit forward and inelegantly grabbed the princess's shoulders, to not fall on her face. Out of reflex, I leapt a few steps forward, even though the princess ... Aurelia had everything under control.

“Oh my, is everything all right?”, she asked.

“Yeah, sorry, I might've overdone it a bit. No more magic for the day I guess.”

“Well, hopefully there won't be any need for that.”

She took the words right out of my mouth. Honestly I really wasn't sure how to join the conversation with how the princess expressed basically what I would've have said.

“I'm Misha, by the way. By the looks of it, you guys don't seem to be from around here, I suppose?”

“No.”, I finally took the opportunity. “We're from the capital of Ataraxia, due to a mission issued by ... someone for sure.” I said, realizing that I had no idea what I actually wanted to say.

“That person was me!” A voice broke a way from the crowd that had slowly started to dissolve, to either get back to their work or to inspect the damage.

“Pastor Ignacio!”, Misha called out to a man that appeared younger than one would imagine a pastor to be. He seemed to be this world's equal to a latinx person, with his skin taking on a darker tone, his hair was cut extremely short and he was also wearing short pants and a long-sleeved shirt, that seemed unfitting for someone called a pastor.

Actually he looked pretty damn fresh for a pastor.

“I just heard about it from the others.” He took a look at the charred remains of some trees a couple of meters ahead. “Turns out you taking on magic was a good choice.” He said suggestively bopping his head toward's Misha's work.

“Thank you. If it wasn't for my sister I probably would never have considered. Also you are a formidable teacher.” She smiled at him warmly, and I wasn't sure whether to read that as romantic attraction considering their possibly uncomfortable age difference.

“Pastor Ignacio, did I get that right?” Shelly took a step forward and upon receiving an affirmative nod, she stretched out her hand. “Hi, I'm Shelly Farnsworth, and I am the supervising teacher for this mission.”

“Ah, of course.” He grasped her hand but contrary to his rough exterior, this movement appeared rather gentle. “Thank you for coming. I hope you had a good journey. Sorry for the uh, little incident, I hope that does not taint your image of our community. Yes, I submitted that

mission, because we might have an, umm, supernatural incident, we are not equipped to deal with.” He gave Raven who was simply watching the scene with an overprotective arm on my shoulder, a weird side-glance. “And you are already defying my expectations ...”

I did not know what to make of that expression.

“I’d like to make a suggestion?” Misha said, directing everyone’s attention towards her.

“How about discussing this in our Inn? You sure’d like to check in, and have a meal while at it.”

“Misha is the daughter of the inns owner, and works there part-time. So of course she is obligated to do some promotion.” He joked.

“And that promotion is surely appreciated.” She came back at him, looking for support in our group.

“I think that sounds great!” Shelly said. “We’ve been traveling for two days, so to have a meal that is not over an improvised camp fire would be a nice change.” She followed Misha who already was going to our new settlement, the pastor next to her.

“Only two days from the capital?”

“Yeeeah, it was one hell of a ride.”

Chapter 16 – Why we're here

We followed Misha to a house not far away from the graveyard. That actually explained how she noticed the fire so quickly. The inn did not seem to have a name and at that point I was too afraid to ask. I mean, it made sense considering it was the only inn the town had, why bother naming it.

She guided us to a round table, quietly shutting down glances of disgust directed at our group. I realized shortly after that they were actually targeting Raven. Considering this was a rural area it made sense for those people to have a rather ... conservative notion, compared to city folks. Seeing this kinda stung, but since Raven did not seem to notice it, I decided to not point it out.

“Is there anything you'd like to order?” She asked us after we took our places. Me between Aurelia and Raynard, and Shelly and the pastor opposite to us.

I looked around the group not really being accustomed to the local cuisine. Everything I've eaten so far was either whatever could be found in the police kitchen or whatever Raven cooked up. (Which, I might add, was quite tasty, if a bit extravagant. Contrary to his usual dress up for cooking which in fact was no dress up at all except for an apron. God bless me every time I left that house a virgin.)

“Don't hesitate to order whatever you want, the academy will cover the expenses.”, Shelly told us.

I hoped to get a clue at what a normal dish to order in this situation was, but got disappointed by Raven answering: “I'm fine, thanks.”

“Oh, do you have pork cutlet?”, Raynard sounded like an excited puppy.

“Sure!”

“Yeeeeeees.” Gosh, he was being too adorable.

“Umm, then I'll take the same.”, Aurelia said.

“Me too.”, I quickly added.

Misha then took Shelly's and Pastor Ignacio's orders.

“Thank god you ordered first, I have no idea how food works around here.” I turned to Raynard who was sitting to my left.

“Me neither, I don't think I ever went out for dinner. And my standards are rather high, so I really didn't want to embarrass myself here.” Aurelia hung her head down with a blank expression.

“Well, at least I am not the only one without common sense around here, haha.”

“Is there anything you'd like to drink?” Misha then again asked. “Tea, beer or simply water?”

“Oh, I'd have your beer.”, Raynard responded to which I tried not to let out a surprised “whaaaa?”, but I simply decided to let it play out. Where I came from the drinking age was 21 and I've never drank so I can't comment on how much sense that made compared to other states where it was 18 or other countries where it was below that, but as Raynard was probably 14 as well ... ugh you get my point.

“Um, is that okay?” Misha asked Shelly, who then looked back at Raynard.

“Back at home drinking with my parents and brother was normal, don't worry about it.” He said.

“Then it's okay I guess.” Shelly responded.

When Misha left I leaned over to Raynard and asked: “Okay, quick question, how is it with alcohol here, exactly?”

“Why would you ask?” Raynard gave me an irritated look, to which I responded with how alcohol works “where I’m from”, bearing in mind that Raynard still doesn’t know where I’m from exactly is.

“Oh wow, that’s so stupid, why would you have laws for this. No, here it’s just like, my parents say it’s okay, so it’s okay.”

“Huh.” I simply responded and decided to let the topic rest.

For now.

Honestly ...

I wondered what drinking alcohol was like, so I might have stolen a few sips from him during our dinner.

As soon as Misha delivered us the aforementioned it was time to talk business.

“So, do you mind if we talk about why we are here while eating?” Shelly asked Ignacio.

“Of course.” Pastor Ignacio said, after which he took a bite of a boiled potato. The hot food made him say a few incomprehensible curses but after a couple more seconds he started talking.

“As it was already said in my notice, more and more corpses seem to be randomly disappearing from the graveyard. It started ...” – he waved his right hand around – “I think three maybe four weeks ago.”

“Did anything unusual happen around that time?” Raynard asked immediately, and I noticed his hands were in the same position since the pastor started speaking.

“Um- ... well” – he leaned a bit forward to whisper something to us – “Sasha, Misha’s older sister actually passed away around that time. Her corpse is still buried though.” He said, now a tad louder.

“How many corpses have been missing?” Raynard asked next.

“I think nearly two dozen. I haven’t really been keeping track, they disappear on a daily basis.” The pastor threw his hands up in an irritated manner.

“Can you make us a list of every corpse that has disappeared so far, with every relevant information such as date of birth, date of death ...”

The pastor chuckled nervously. “Oh boy, you’re really eager to get to the bottom of this, huh?”

“... Well, obviously ...”, Raynard simply responded unsuccessfully trying to hide an irritated pout.

“I should be able to do that tomorrow morning.”

“Why would anyone do this?”, Aurelia asked. “I mean what use do corpses have? They’re ... dead.” She put her cutlery to the side and looked around our group.

“I mean, necromancy is ... sort of a thing.” Shelly replied.

“It is?”, I exclaimed probably louder than necessary.

“As I said sort of. Thing is – you’ll actually be having a necromancy class next semester, but anyway – so far it’s highly theoretical. Vampires are so far the only known species to be capable of successfully performing necromancy. There have been attempts at trying to replicate it but it seems not even vampire’s really have a clue as to how they work.”

“So vampires it is then?”

“I don’t know man, I think corpses don’t have the best taste?”, Raynard remarked. “Not that I’m speaking out of experience though. But as far as I know the corpses must not have been through rigor mortis yet, to be resurrected. Is that right?” He asked Shelly, suddenly unsure of

himself. To be honest, I began thinking he might have more information stored in his brain than my grimoire has.

“Yes, that seems to be the one thing the ... ‘necromancing community’ seems to agree on. But just in case, you don’t have a problem with aggressive vampires around here, do you?”

Pastor Ignacio who so far followed the conversation while eating in silence righted himself and held a finger up signaling us to let him finish chewing.

“We don’t have a problem with vampires, but living near the forest isn’t that safe either. In fact” – he looked at a watch on his right wrist – “it should soon be time.”

“Time for what?”, I asked, even though I kinda knew there was no point in asking.

Church bells went off not too far from here. In fact, if I remembered correctly the church was just next door. Not too long after that though, the entire room found itself covered in the murmuring of the entire townsfolk that was present at the inn. I also noticed everyone clasping their hands together, so I figured it must have been a prayer.

Our group, except for the pastor, just looked at each other with varying degrees of blinking white guy meme, until the entire room simultaneously got shivers down their spine. Surprised by this sudden sensation I tried not to make any noise.

If I was in my world, I would jokingly refer to this sensation as a message from god, but even after only having spent a couple of days in this one, I wasn’t so sure, if maybe there wasn’t some god after all.

The prayer ended shortly after and the casual chatter resumed.

“So, I guess that was your first time experiencing our evening prayer?” Misha, who suddenly appeared with a gentle smile on her face, asked our group. “You need something to drink?”

“No, we’re fine.”, Shelly answered on behalf of our group.

“Yeah, I don’t trust your beer, it made my skin all tingly just now.”, Raynard said.

“Oh, hahaha!” Misha’s eyes widened in surprise before she laughed herself to tears. That’s one way to react to a rude customer.

“Oh god, I’m sorry. That’s probably the first time someone reacted this way to the prayer, haha.” She coughed softly before fully regaining her composure. “No, that was the effect of our evening prayer. Every evening when the church bells ring, the entire town chants this spell to protect ourselves from monsters. That shiver just now was because of the high concentration of magic in the inn. After all, more than a dozen people were using magic right now.”

“Wow, that’s impressive ...”, Shelly admitted.

“Yeah, I mean, I already saw you in action today”, Aurelia commented, “but that the entire town was capable of using such a spell is ... certainly impressive. I always thought people outside of big cities weren’t likely to know any magic at all.”

“That’s because I have a teaching license. I got it after graduating from Ataraxia academy around 20 ... 22 years ago.”

“Twenty-! How old were you again ...?” Shelly exclaimed what everyone thought right now.

I would have thought that maybe he was approaching his thirties but ... nope! I don’t want to think about his age right now!

[Pastor Ignacio is around 38 years, 3 months and 1 day old.]

Oh, heh, thanks honey.

[Of course my darling~(n̄v̄•)~.]

While I was chatting with the thing in my backpack, the conversation seemed to already have moved on.

“Anyway, it’s getting late. Thankfully the church is next door, so I rarely have to worry about getting home after dark.” As he stood up, I noticed that a lot of people have actually left since the bells rung. I assumed that those left behind were guests at the inn, but I was curious what was going on.

“Is it, like, especially dangerous at night? Or why are most people already gone?”

“Oh, yes, actually. This has to do with how the spell works. The more people who this spell has been cast on are close to each other the stronger it gets. Wandering out alone not only potentially puts you, but also you’re people in danger. Oh, don’t worry about yourselves though. With how many people are in the inn, you should be safe. Although, haha, you are probably capable of protecting the entire town, should it be necessary. Anyway. It was a pleasure talking to you, and I’ll make sure to gather any relevant information until tomorrow. Good night.”

We saw him off, and then decided to get our rooms.

“As it seems we don’t have that much to do anymore, since sun is already down, so I guess we should get our rooms?” Shelly proposed.

Misha who was standing by our side the entire time talked to her mother at the reception and handed us our keys afterwards. One room for the girls, one for the boys, because you can’t escape heteronormativity even in another world.

Our rooms where upstairs (because of course they are) next to each other, and when Raven opened our door Raynard already jumped into the first of the two beds available.

And then I realized oh-no-there’s-only-one-bed.

Raven picked me up and carried me to the bed while I only let out *highly enthusiastic* squeals.

Chapter 17 – Beginning our investigation

Turns out sharing your bed with an incubus has its perks.

Although probably I would have said that about every other person that would have shared a bed with me.

Wow, I really was starved for affection.

Anyway, being spooned by Raven made sleeping on this old sturdy mattress ten times more bearable. I really don't get how Raynard was able to just pass out on his bed like that, fully clothed on top of that. And even more so, how he could wake up as soon as the sun rose.

His bed creaked as he sat up and stretched himself with a big yawn. I pretended to be still asleep while enjoying being hugged by a muscular arm from behind. Just laying in bed after having woken up and enjoying the comfiness of not having to do anything: the best.

“Rise and shine! We need to get to work!” Raynard said enthusiastically. Only farm boys could be this excited about waking up early. Though waking up with the first beams of sunlight had something oddly comforting to it.

“I am awake. I just refuse to move.” I replied.

“Okay, so, either you wake up and you get a coffee, or I'll bring you the coffee, and pour it over you. Which one would please you more?”

My eyes opened in shock.

“Raynard! I did not know you had a sadistic side!”

“My mom always used to say that on the rare occasion that I wasn't willing to wake up. After a couple times she would actually deliver on that threat.” This statement was followed by a bitter laugh.

“Oh.”

I lifted Raven's arm off of my chest and got dressed before waking him up.

“Morning master.” He said to which I ignored him.

I thought about going to the girls' room and maybe getting into some ecchi situation but I wasn't in the mood for that. Instead the three of us went downstairs and got ourselves some breakfast. Shelly and Aurelia followed a bit later.

“There you are!” Shelly exclaimed when she spotted us at the same table we occupied the day before. “I thought you'd still be asleep, so I went to your room. Was really surprised to not find you in your beds.”

“Yeah, I thought about going over as well, but figured you might not be in an approachable state.” I told them.

“Good thing you did that.” She mumbled in my direction. “Turns out the princess isn't really there yet without her hot brown morning potion.”

I took a look at the princess who was already seated. My mom used to say cold coffee makes you prettier, but she seemed like a lost case.

We ate our breakfast and occasionally talked. It consisted of basic bread, butter and jam. I realized that food seemed to have a rich variety no matter where you go. Was magic making trade easier in this world? I mean, how would they get coffee here? We don't really seem to be in a tropical region.

[Magic fertilizer makes it possible to grow any crop anywhere.]

Magic fertilizer? What, you mean like unicorn poop?

[Exactly.]

...

Maybe I should just throw this book into a ditch and never question anything ever again?

I noticed Raven just sat there and stared at me. At first I wasn't sure, whether that was still the effect of the spell, until I again realized the disgusted stares some customers threw at his direction.

Now, if I was a nice person, I could stand up and call everyone out, but that wasn't me. I always liked the fantasy of calling out someone's negative behavior in front of everyone and getting lots of support and appreciation, but I also knew, that it would probably never happen that way.

At least here.

I'd probably draw lots of negative attention towards us.

I was curious if Raven actually wasn't aware of how his surroundings perceived him, or if he just chose to not give a shit. But, considering it was a century old being I talked about I figured it would be the latter.

I instead decided to do some small talk with him, maybe that would at the very least help him.

"Aren't you going to eat?" I decided to comment on how Raven never felt the need to eat or drink at all.

"Oh, I don't need to," he simply replied.

"What, because you feed on my soul?" I joked.

"That's ... not how it works."

"Succubi and Incubi mainly feed on man. Usually if an Incubus has a victim he can feast upon, he can last about a month without eating or drinking anything else." Raynard again impressed with his overwhelming knowledge. "And even if he doesn't have a human to suck out, he can usually last a week before getting hungry ... is that correct ...?" He asked Raven sheepishly.

"Couldn't have explained that better, kid," Raven confirmed with an acknowledging smile. "So yeah, there's basically no need to worry."

"Vampire's are similar by the way." Shelly explained. "They get most of their powers from blood, and can live on that alone for quite a while."

"I don't get it though. Not wanting to eat must be terrible." Raynard said while chewing on his bread. His remark earned a chuckle from the princess.

"Oh, you're awake now princess?" I asked.

"Yes, I drank my coffee, ate breakfast, I'd say it's time for some training!"

"Training?"

"Yes! Those babies didn't just appear out of thin air." She said, to which she flexed her right biceps.

Crush me.

Me and Raynard looked at her thick arm in awe, Raven only commented it with a barely audible "Mine's bigger."

"Actually that sounds like an excellent idea," Shelly exclaimed and made Aurelia seem more like a teacher's pet now. "While we're waiting for the pastor to show up and give us the result of his 'digging' we should do a bit of warm up. After all this is still a school event, which means learning comes first."

I cringed at the really inappropriate pun she made, but convinced myself it was the thought of physical exercise that made me feel this way.

I'm only fourteen years old, but I can barely run a 100 meters without desperately gasping for air and I had mild scoliosis, so the mere act of standing upright was a literal pain in the ass. This wasn't going to end well.

Thankfully standing up was barely necessary, as the pastor nearly flew through the inn's entrance a moment later.

"Misha! Marie! Sasha's grave has been dug up!"

Misha who was just cleaning up a table after a customer did not seem to register what the pastor just had said, until her movement abruptly halted.

"What?"

She dropped and pushed past the pastor who was leaning against the door frame breathing heavily.

"Misha!" Her mother Marie exclaimed and pursued her daughter. The pastor moved outside the door to let the lady pass through.

I looked at the others, and they looked back at me, until Aurelia came up and said, "Let's go!"

She jogged through the door and we followed her.

Soon the other people from the inn followed and gathered at the nearby graveyard. We watched scene from a little distance.

Misha stood atop a human-sized hole in the ground, staring down at an empty coffin. Next to the grave was a pile of dirt, that without a doubt was once inside that hole.

No-one said anything for a while until a faint "Oh no." escaped Marie's lips.

I could only see Misha's expression from the side, but it was some mix of anger, confusion and frustration.

"What should we do?" I asked the others, because this peculiar situation started to get a bit overwhelming. I've lost people in the past, that was nothing new for me, but losing someone after thinking they were already gone took this to an entirely new level.

"Figuring out what's going on," Raynard said, his expression unusually grim for his usually cheerful attitude. He nodded towards the pastor, who was consoling Marie with a calming hand on her shoulder, and looked at the princess and me waiting for our approval.

We nodded back and accompanied Raynard to the older man.

"Pastor?" Raynard said, and waited for him to turn around. "I don't want to rush you, but I think we should get started."

"Of course." The pastor turned back to Misha and her mother. "I am so sorry I let this happen again. You should go back to the inn for now, the Ataraxian magicians will handle this from here. If you need someone to talk to you should find me in my office as per usual."

He made a quick bow and then scurried of towards the church.

"Okay everyone, it is best if you got home now!" Shelly tried breaking off the commotion. "We will handle the situation from here on! For the time being you should avoid the graveyard, it might be dangerous around here! We'll make sure to clear this situation up as soon as possible."

The crowd of people starting dissolving and I could hear different kinds of murmuring and chatter from different directions.

"Poor girl. Not only was her death a tragedy, now her family has even more reason to mourn."

“Why can’t the pastor handle this himself? There’s a lot of talented magicians in our village apart from Misha.”

“Right? And to let this filthy incubus into our village ...”

I turned around to look for Raven, spotting him a distance away from the chattering people, and prompted him to come to me.

“Listen,” I already felt bad about what I was about to say, “I don’t mean to offend you, but I think it would be best if you stayed at our room.”

“Why? I don’t care what those people think about me. It’s always been this way.” He sounded bitter, even though he didn’t look like it.

“Yeah, but it kind of hurts seeing them trash talk you. And I wish I could help, but I think we’re the minority here.”

“I’m way stronger than them. I could kill them if I wanted to.”

“But I don’t want to! It would only prove their point.”

The sudden prospect of killing made me accidentally raise my voice. Why did that idea suddenly seem so foreign for me? He wanted to kill me like a week ago. And now that weird spell that hit him in the cave was messing with his mind. Maybe I should be thankful that this Deus ex Machina turned out to be in our favor, but ... this felt wrong.

“If that is the case then I don’t want to either,” he answered as I expected him to do.

“Also, I think Shelly would have a problem with you helping us with the mission. I really don’t want to be expelled from the academy before even being a proper student there.”

“Well then, since that is what you wish...” he said and turned in direction of the inn. “Don’t hesitate to call me in case you need something.”

“I will.” I watched him as he walked away before turning back to the main event.

Aurelia was apparently consoling Misha and her mother, while Shelly and Raynard talked to some townspeople who seemed really concerned about basically everything. The pastor called out to Raynard with a stack of papers in his hands.

Well, that was awkward.

[I am yet about to learn your definition of the human emotion you call “awkward” but I can confirm.]

Say, you wouldn’t know anything about the spell that hit Raven, would you?

My brain was flooded information in an instant.

[Name: >>Cupid’s arrow.<<]

[MP: >>777<<]

[>>A strong hypnotic spell, more commonly referred to as a spell of love that makes the enchanted submissive to the first person they see after the spell being cast.<<]

[>>It is strongest immediately after being chanted.<<]

[>>The duration of it’s effects vary depending on multiple factors such as how the enchanted perceived their object of desire before the spell took effect, as well as race.<<]

[>>Gender does not play a role.<<]

[>>Succubi and Incubi have shown to be affected by the spell for the longest time, ranging from weeks to months in certain instances.<<]

[I have filtered the information to what I perceived to be you biggest interest in regards to the effect.]

[Would you like to give me some feedback about my accuracy?]

P- Perfect! Actually, that's pretty much everything I wanted to know ...

[That is good to hear.]

I wasn't sure what to think about that. On one hand I didn't like the idea of ... well, mind control, on the other hand, I could not predict, if he would become dangerous, after the spell wore off.

Wow, I'm in a weird predicament.

But at least I knew I still had a couple more weeks of time to figure out how to deal with him.

With procraaastinaaaaation!

Yeah.

No wonder I still haven't bothered to find a way home.

I approached Raynard and asked if he already found anything.

"Still digging through it," he said, shuffling around the papers in his hand. "Everything seems pretty random, except that there might be a preference for younger people to be stolen. That was a weird sentence to say."

"Yikes."

"Don't worry, we will figure this out, I promise," I heard the princess tell Misha. She took her mother by the shoulder and they got back to the inn.

"So, that was taken care of I guess." Aurelia approached us while running her fingers through her hair. She appeared rather exhausted.

So much for morning workout.

Raynard repeated to her what he just told me.

"So, what's next?" I asked, keeping my voice low.

"Why are you whispering?" Aurelia asked in return.

"Isn't that what you do at a cemetery?"

"It's not like they'll wake up or anything."

"Well ...", Raynard exclaimed.

"Actually," I had a weird thought, "could they wake up? I mean is that possible?"

"There are puppeteer spells if I recall correctly, but I have never heard of anyone actually using one on a human. That would be ... messed up and morally wrong on so many levels, I don't want to talk about it. Though, to make sure we should check for a mana signature."

"Mana signature?" I asked, to which Raynard and the grimoire gave me a nearly simultaneous response.

"[When a spell is used it leaves traces of mana in the air, a unique signature of the caster, similar to a finger print.]"

"That's also why unauthorized casting can get you in jail very easily," Raynard expanded upon the knowledge provided by the grimoire.

"There are a couple of spells that are able to make the signatures visible to the human eye," Aurelia explained. "We haven't learned them though, I think?"

"Yeah, I think it's on the curriculum for year 4 for some reason," Raynard confirmed.

"In that case, good thing you have a police officer in your group," Shelly directed the attention towards herself, and slowly walked up to the grave.

We followed her, while she murmured some words, I wasn't able to pick up. After finishing her chant, she formed a circle with both her hands in front of her and blew through it, making her

breath visible, as if we had temperatures below zero. The breath spread, and dissipated after a couple seconds without anything happening.

I glanced to the other two next to me, hoping for any reaction telling me what to make of this situation, until Shelly said: “Well, this grave seems to have been dug up without the help of magic. Someone surely knows their craft.”

“That’s stupid. If they would have used their magic, they could have just closed the hole again. No one would have noticed, and we wouldn’t be investigating in the first place,” Aurelia exclaimed.

“Maybe the culprit was just stupid?” I shrugged to emphasize my opinion. “I mean, I wouldn’t probably think that far, ahahah...”

“Anyway, I think we should first try to find out, where the corpses disappeared to, before making an assumption as to why and how,” Raynard stated. “The fact, that the grave has been dug up but not closed again must mean, that there is only one culprit behind all of this. They must have dug up the graves carried the corpse away but not have had enough time to close them properly again.”

“That’s also, what I thought,” Shelly confirmed.

“Isn’t it weird though, how really no-one saw or heard anything?”, I voiced my opinion. “I mean, obviously this happened at night, but still isn’t it weird how there isn’t any witnesses?”

“Well, that’s because of the monsters, isn’t it?” Aurelia replied.

I remembered the conversation we had with Misha and the pastor the evening before.

“Well, isn’t that awfully convenient?”

“Anyway, seeing how there wasn’t enough time to close the graves, this could either mean, that the corpses were taken somewhere far away from here, and there was no time, or opening the graves took a really long time, and the corpses were taken somewhere close,” Raynard completed his train of thought.

“Well, the closest buildings to the graveyard are the inn and the church,” Aurelia reckoned.

“Ugh, having Aster and his gaze would be incredibly helpful now,” I sighed.

“Sorry, he sadly doesn’t have a teaching license,” Shelly explained. “Also I’m pretty sure a lot of people are actually unaware of his existence ...”

Wow, being a good spy must be extremely lonely ...

“We can rule out the inn though, I think,” Shelly through in. “We probably would have heard – and smelled – anything unusual, I guess.”

“Corpses in the church also seem unlikely,” I said and took a look around the area in hopes to get some input.

The forest.

... That couldn’t be it, or could it?

“What about the forest?” I asked, because there wasn’t anything else, I could possibly do.

“Seems unlikely,” Raynard said.

“Exactly.”

“Aren’t there like monsters in there?” Aurelia asked.

“Yeah, but hear me out, no-one actually goes into the forest because of that, right?” I reasoned. “So it would be easy and not exactly dangerous to hide a body on the edge of the forest at night, and then come back during day time to hide it somewhere else, which ideally would be further into the forest.”

“Is there any place inside the forest, where you could ... do anything?”

“I could help you find out.” Misha suddenly approached us from behind.

“Misha,” Aurelia exclaimed. “Don’t you work at the inn or something?”

“Around this time we don’t have many customers, so I get a bit of free-time,” she exclaimed accompanied by a faint smile. “Also my mother told me she needed a bit of alone time ... anyway did I get that right, that you are planning on checking out the forest?”

“Well ...” Me and the princess replied in unison.

“I’d like to accompany you,” Misha offered. “I want to find to out what happened to my sister.”

“But isn’t it dangerous inside the forest?” Raynard voiced his concerns.

“Don’t worry, most dangerous monsters are nocturnal, it should be way safer than during night-time. In fact, I am one of the few people tasked regularly to go to the forest to gather firewood. So I know my way around.” She again had this overly carefree smile that was kind of unfitting for the whole situation.

“Also there is actually one unusual location inside the forest, I can help you find.”

“What would that be?” Raynard inquired.

“... I’ll best explain when we’re there,” Misha replied after searching for words for a while.

Our group looked at Shelly for approval.

“Well, there’s no helping it, I guess.” She shrugged and left her relaxed pose, to turn to Misha directly. “Please lead us through the forest.”

“With pleasure,” Misha said again with that smile.

Chapter 18 – Blackwood Forest

We entered the forest through the same spot where there was the fire the other day. Some of the trees were still charred and I wondered whether anyone would ever bother to clear them away.

There was no real path leading into the forest, probably because no-one was supposed to enter it on a regular basis.

Misha took the lead and we followed her close behind, with Shelly closing off the group in the rear.

I took a look around the trees bracing myself for a monster attack any moment. I noticed birds flying from tree to tree, until one in particular caught my eye: It's behavior seemed unlike the other birds. It didn't chirp, its movements appeared to be very stiff, and it seemed to always be near us, even as we went deeper into the forest. Its completely white body made it stand out among the others.

After a while I decided to be annoyed by it and point it out.

"I'm sorry, am I the only one noticing this sketchy white bird following us?"

Misha who was in the front turned around and exclaimed, "that's Al!" before holding out her hand and calling out to the bird again.

The bird landed on her arm and I noticed that this bird wasn't covered in feathers at all. In fact it didn't seem to be made out of flesh at all.

"Everyone, meet Alabaster, or Al for short."

The bird of course didn't say anything – it didn't move at all, actually – but I imagined him saying "konnichi wa" to cast off that eerie aura emanating from him.

"Um, what exactly is he?" I asked.

"He is a summon my sister created with earth magic," Misha explained.

"Your sister created it?" Shelly exclaimed in surprise.

"Yes."

"Wow, she must have been awfully talented at magic." She scratched her head with a bewildered expression. "Creating summons is so incredibly hard, it got removed from the curriculum, when I was still at the academy, because most students would fail the course."

"Yeah, my sister was also incredibly good at magic, but it wasn't like she just knocked it up out of nowhere. There were a lot of failure's and Al here is the only one she ever made actually."

"And she learned all that from the pastor?", Aurelia questioned.

"Yeah, he also must be incredibly talented," Raynard said.

"Since my sisters passing he's just been flying around aimlessly. I feel sad for him, but at the same time he doesn't have a conscience or anything, does he?"

"That's actually been an ongoing debate for a couple of decades now," Shelly brought up. "Summons follow every command their creator gives them, but are able to make own decisions, if the request allows or requires it. Also they usually take the shape of animals and since they are made of magic some have argued we should actually classify them as monsters. But in my opinion since they are man-made they can't really be compared to naturally occurring species."

She finished of her lengthy explanation with an unconcerned shrug.

"So now that his creator is dead, he doesn't have any command to obey and is just ... minding his own business, right?" I figured.

"Yeah, that's what most summons do in that case," Shelly replied.

“Actually, he sometimes does obey my commands. Sasha used him to observe from afar through his point of view. I can’t do that, because obviously I’m not connected to him, but I could still try to tell him to scout the region for anything unusual?”

“That’s an idea,” Raynard responded.

“Okay, um, first Alabaster: Go and search for any corpses I guess?”

With that Alabaster took off with incredibly heavy flaps. I wondered how a bird made of stone could fly at all. We decided to slowly go on while we waited for him to return. It took him some amount of time I wasn’t sure of, but man this forest was way bigger than I originally imagined.

He landed on Misha’s arm and shook his head. I was sort of surprised to not hear a creaking sound coming from this creature.

“Thanks, well then next: are there any monsters nearby?” She asked. “Just in case.”

The bird flew off again.

I prayed for there not to be any monsters, because I was basically incapable of combat.

I could probably defend myself using the grimoire, but so far the only spell I was able to use was a light spell. I didn’t even have a knife or any weapon at all.

Who thought it would be a good idea to let me wander off without any way to defend myself like that?

God maybe I should learn some more spells.

Al came back shortly after departing, landed on Misha’s arm again and nodded three times.

“There’s three monsters nearby. Probably tempest wolves, they are the most common kind around here.”

Tempest wolves, well doesn’t that sound great?

“Those shouldn’t be a problem, but you should still be careful,” Shelly said, again in a laid-back manner.

Wait a minute ...

“Why should **we** be careful?!” I exclaimed after realizing the hidden meaning behind her sentence.

“Well, technically I am only a supervisor,” she explained. “You should be able to handle those wolves yourselves, I only step in when necessary. Thank god Raven isn’t here with us, my report is already a mess, even without having to omit his involvement.”

“You know, you – a police officer – are just now talking openly about forging legal documents, right?”

“Well, its not like you’d benefit from snitching on me, right?”

“Ugh, whatever, you’re giving me a headache.”

I shook her statement off, and faced the other way.

“So, how do we proceed? Is there any viable strategies against those tempest wolves?” I asked Misha but received information from my grimoire instead.

[Name: >>Tempest Wolves<<]

[Race: >>Monster<<]

[Element: >>Wind<<]

[>>Tempest Wolves primarily can be found in forests.<<]

[>>They usually travel in packs of three to four which makes them dangerous to the individual even though they are among the weaker monsters.<<]

[>>They use wind magic to accelerate themselves to speeds no other living being could reach.<<]

[>>They also are capable of reading the air for orientation, similar to birds orienting themselves using the magnetic field.<<]

[>>Recommended spell:<<]

[>>Gale<<]

That ... was a lot.

I still wasn't used to the way information was simply pumped into my brain.

Still, is this one spell the only way to fight against these monsters?

[There are a number of advanced spells that you won't be able to use at your current level.]

[Also physical combat is an option but is discouraged in your case.]

Well, thanks for the reminder. Anyway, what does that gale spell do.

[>> >Gale< casts a strong gust of wind.<<]

[>>Depending on the users ability the spell can cause great damage on the casters surroundings.<<]

[>>It can also disrupt the >Tempest Wolves<' ability to read the air and thus disorient them.<<]

"Then I guess, I'll just be staying behind and casting Gale ..." I muttered.

"Um I guess?" Misha tilted her head and looked at me in confusion. I did the same not understanding her confusion.

Aurelia nudged me from the side and whispered: "You should try not to react to an answer before it was given."

And then I understood and resisted facepalming myself.

"Ugh, that was that stupid grimoire," I whispered back.

"I get it," she chuckled, "just be careful."

Al flew between us and directed our attention forward. The others were already going ahead.

We quickly caught up.

"Hey," I called out, "you shouldn't just leave us behind."

"Oh, don't worry, nothing's gonna happen to you," Shelly answered.

I had a feeling this statement was directed more at the princess than at me.

"That's kind of irresponsible for a teacher ..." Aurelia said. I noticed her getting continuously more fed up with Shelly.

"Those Tempest Wolves are only D-Rank monsters, they really shouldn't be a problem for the two of you."

"D-Rank...?" I repeated what she said. Contrary to what I expected the grimoire did not immediately provide any information to my inquiry.

"Over the past couple of years we have started ranking monsters depending on how much they pose a threat to the average citizen. F-Rank is the lowest, E, D, C, B, A and then S being the highest," she counted on her fingers. "Though our standards have shifted over the last years, as our catalogue of monsters and their abilities is still incomplete. Who knows, maybe the idea gets scrapped in a couple of years." She scratched her head. "The governor was actually hoping to make these lists official, and the headmaster of Ataraxia wanted to help reform the curriculum using them, but at this point they are pretty much unusable, since incomplete."

“Wow, I didn’t know that,” Raynard exclaimed. “I’d like to take a look at one of those lists, though. Might learn a few things from them.”

[>>Information added.<<]

Information added? What’s that supposed to mean? I thought you possessed nigh infinite knowledge?

I thought in a mocking manner. At least I hoped it sounded mocking.

That grimoire probably had no idea.

[A ranking system for monsters was not in use at the time of my creation.]

[If possible I’d like to absorb the information from those lists, to create my own ranking systems based on this society’s standards.]

Yeah, remind me, when we are back in Ataraxia, I’m sure Shelly can help with that.

“We shouldn’t take that much longer,” Misha said, as she looked very closely at her surroundings.

I realized that was probably the first time I was actually in a forest.

I lived in the city for most of my life.

Though, I remember the orphanage I lived at for a while was situated near a forest, we weren’t ever allowed to enter. It was on the outskirts and honestly I really liked it there. Wasn’t as glum as downtown.

We reached a clearing that was small enough for it to have been natural. But the shack-sized stone structure said otherwise.

It looked like the entrance to some sort of tomb, a heavy stone door, that was covered in weird glyphs.

A pack of three hounds covered in white fur stalked around the heavy entrance to whatever this was, nosing the fissures between the gate and its frame. One of them was standing on its hind paws, scratching the gray surface.

Our group immediately froze as soon as we spotted the monsters a couple of meters ahead.

I was thinking about doing something stupid, but knowing I had the highest chance of getting killed out of our group I dropped the idea. I was in all likelihood not going to be resurrected after all. (Though that still had to be proven.)

We stood still for what I thought was too much time alone with my thoughts until finally Misha gave us a signal to slowly back off.

We sneaked back a few meters and hid behind a couple of bushes.

“What are they doing?” Aurelia asked.

“Uh, wrong question,” Raynard threw in, “what are **we** doing?”

“I don’t know,” Misha hissed, “either of those. It seems they sense something from behind this gate, though it might only be an airstream, that’s irritating them.”

“What exactly is this gate?” I asked.

“I think this gate might be connected to our village. You know, all the buildings in our town are connected through tunnels under ground. Though there is a secret tunnel under the church that leads into the forest. Well, I call it secret but everyone in town knows about it, but that’s because it is an old emergency exit that was used back in the days when this area had heavy problems with a certain pack of thieves. At least that’s what I was told.

“As far as I know, there are other exits in other areas, but that’s the only one I know about, because I’ve stumbled upon it quite a while ago,” Misha looked towards the gate after finishing her explanation. “Anyway, we should figure out, what to do about these babies.”

“I could use a gale spell to distract them,” I suggested. “I’m not of much use other than that, I think.” I laughed awkwardly.

“You can do that?”, Misha asked and I nodded.

“I can shield you, so you can get a better view,” Raynard said. “I’m not more useful than that either.” Again an awkward laugh.

“Thanks,” I said.

“Good, then I think the three of us will take them down.” Misha decided and looked at Aurelia and Shelly for approval.

“No, I’m only stepping in, in the case of an emergency,” Shelly declined. “You four are quite capable in your disciplines, you should be able to handle it.”

“Okay, then only the two of us,” Misha said. “Should we attack the same wolf, or split up.”

“I think we should be able to handle them with the distraction,” Aurelia replied.

“I have a short sword, so just in case, I could come to your help,” Raynard claimed.

“Alright.” Misha looked at the gate again, where the wolves were still going about. “I take left you right.”

Aurelia nodded in confirmation.

“Okay then boys, go.”

Raynard got up ahead of me and sprinted towards the clearing. I followed behind him, though I’d have admit I could not keep up with him. But the distance was too short for it to make any difference.

The ears of the two wolves that were on the ground with all four of their feet twitched signaling that we were sensed, but Raynard already started chanting some sort of spell kneeling on the ground.

I halted behind him and tried to access the Gale spells information. Maybe it was stupid just jumping into the action like this, but I was confident I would be able to pull it off. Normally I would think that I simply had to press a button like in a game to make an attack, but it was actually much more complicated than that.

Using Gale was actually quite similar to Luminae the spell, that Aurelia wanted me to try out, in that I had to concentrate my mana on my palms. Thankfully I had some sort of practice at it, or else I would mess up. I concentrated until I felt a tingling on the palms of both of my hands and finally I clasped them together.

A strong gust of wind made the nearby trees shake and the recoil of the spell cost me my balance. I made an inelegant butt-landing, but thankfully Raynard was able to withstand. Not that it mattered because the Tempest Wolves that were just about to attack had their fair share of problems holding their own balance.

The one that was busy scratching the doors surface was first pressed against its object of affection, and then fell over backwards while the right one was clutching its heads with its paws as if it were having a strong headache. The left one that was just in the middle of speeding towards us was crashing against a tree on the edge of the clearing.

“Crap,” I heard Misha swear as she sprinted towards the left wolf that had traveled a considerable distance.

“Nice one Nathan!” Aurelia shouted while she approached the right wolf, lifting it into the air with an uppercut that doubled as an earth-raising spell.

Seems like I’ve outdone myself. I highly doubt this spell was supposed to lift foes of their feet.

Misha’s wolf was an easy target as it appeared quite distraught after having its attack disrupted and crashing against a tree, as was Aurelia’s. She sent it flying to buy time, and after catching up, rammed her fist into its stomach, causing it to vomit blue blood.

The middle one though wasn’t as easy. After rolling around on its back for a bit, it finally managed to get up on its feet and immediately attacked the first thing that caught his eye, which was Raynard. Luckily my Gale seemed to still disrupt its magic, as it wasn’t leaping in the same way Misha’s wolf did. Instead it sprinted towards Raynard but seemed to have a change of heart after crossing half the distance, probably noticing his spell.

So it jumped into the air, too late for Raynard to react properly.

Luckily I was already on my feet and Raynard also jumped, trying to stop the wolf midair, but only to moderate success. He only managed to grab the wolf by its hindlegs but that just seemed to help the wolf.

It sprouted its claws and aimed for me.

I reflexively hold up my arms in front of my face and stumbled backward.

You know, I was hoping for my grimoire to block the attack, but it was hidden in my backpack. I could feel the pull, but it wasn’t able to break free.

And that’s why those sharp blades cut the skin open on my forearms.

Some ugly sound came from within my throat, as I let myself fall on the ground where blood started tainting the green grass. Immediately I felt the temperature drop in my limbs and I struggled to breathe.

Somewhere I could hear Raynard shouting at the girls for help, while Shelly came running towards me.

[If your wound doesn’t get treated you will die in approximately one hour.]

It took a bit for me to get a grip, but by then the last wolf also lay dead on the ground, while Shelly was patching up my wounds with some bandages she brought along in foresight and the help of Misha’s magic.

“Well that went great,” I groaned out somewhat sarcastically. I stood up the moment Shelly finished the bandages because that attack made so much adrenaline shoot through my body I wasn’t able to stand still.

“Actually, your spell was a lot of help. Without that it would probably have been a harder battle,” Aurelia acknowledged.

“Ugh, whatever.” I was sort of bitter, even though I knew it was my fault somewhere. Still her compliment made me blush, though I wasn’t sure if my blood loss allowed for it to show. But what do I know.

“Hey don’t sweat it, you did great,” Raynard now also complimented me.

I remained silent but was definitely blushing.

“So, what are we gonna do about this mess?” I commented on the look of the battlefield. “Are those edible?”

“I mean if you want to end up dying, sure,” the princess mocked me. “I mean we could at least bottle their mana, maybe sell their fur? But that would be too much effort, eh?”

“Their mana?”

“Oh yeah, monsters bleed mana instead of blood.”

I was thankful for a moment that no-one would question my weird inquiries.

“But we don’t happen to have any bottles to fill up now, do we?” She asked into the group.

Shelly, prepared as she was, fished a few bottles from her bag and gave them to Aurelia and Raynard who also offered to help.

“Wait do you intend to drink it just like that?!” My voice rose in surprise and I paid no attention to the burning pain in my arms.

“Well, it really does not taste that well, but it’s better than dying from mana loss.” She knelt on the ground next to a corpse.

“Okaaaaaaay...” I decided to just. Stop. Asking.

It really was for the best.

“Don’t worry we’ve got this.”

“Wanna take a look at the gate?” Misha offered and I concurred.

The gate was a lot taller than I was. A child would be able to stand on my shoulders and we would still fit through it. It allowed for at least four people to go through simultaneously.

“Why were those wolves ... inspecting this gate so closely?” I asked, brushing my fingers against the light scratch marks on the hard surface. I barely managed to hold myself back from sniffing just like they did. “Did they sense something?”

“As I said, I think it was just some air current, that was irritating them. Thing is, you can’t open the gate from this side. Or maybe you can, it might have to do something with the glyphs on the frame,” she theorized while pointing them out.

The glyphs that were carved into the stone almost looked like some sort of Asian or at least eastern alphabet. In my world that is. It struck me as familiar, but I couldn’t point out, what exactly it was.

I took one lap around the stone structure, looking for any way to enter, but to no avail.

When I returned to Misha, Aurelia, Raynard and Shelly, who watched everything from afar joined us. Alabaster was also sitting on Misha’s shoulder.

“Anything?” The princess asked.

“Doesn’t look like it. It won’t open from the outside,” I reported.

“This tunnel leads us to the church,” Misha elaborated. “But only the priest knows how to get there, and also navigating this labyrinth won’t be easy probably.”

“So, we basically came here for nothing?”

“Sorry, everyone.”

“I mean, we could ask the pastor to lead us through the labyrinth,” Raynard proposed.

“You know, the only one who has access to the labyrinth **is** the pastor. If anyone was hiding something in there it had to be him. And in that case he wouldn’t ask us to solve his own crime, would he?” I objected.

“I don’t know guys, this whole thing is simply too weird,” Aurelia said with a tired voice.

“I agree,” Shelly added. “Everything about this stinks, we should keep our eyes open.”

The police officer, and at the moment our teacher, I guess, took a look around the area and finally declared: “We should head back to the village. I doubt we find anything useful in here except more monsters.”

We headed back to the inn, unsure if we could call anything that happened today a success.

Chapter 19 – Breaking the law legally (again)

We returned to the inn in the early evening. As we were in the middle of the summer, the sun hadn't yet set but the general ruckus of the small town was already quieting down.

We entered the inn through the front door and Misha greeted her mother with an energetic, "I'm back!"

Maria was talking to what appeared to be the first evening guests and filling up their cups with what was without a doubt an alcoholic beverage.

"Misha, where have you been so long?" Maria brushed her annoyance off and added, "Pastor Ignacio wants to see you. You should go over to the church and talk to him," she ordered.

"Um, you sure you won't be needing any help here?" Misha looked rightfully concerned considering the circumstances.

"Don't you worry about that. This has been a rough couple of days, and you should look out for yourself. And I think the pastor is exactly the person who can help you with that."

I kinda got the vibes that Maria wanted to hook her daughter up, but I didn't want to make wild assumptions, so I asked, "The pastor certainly has a reputation here, doesn't he?"

"Yeah, he is probably the strongest mage in town after all, and also he makes a good counselor," Misha explained. "Actually, if there is any issue at all, you can count on him. The good he's done to our village is beyond comparison. Anyway," Misha took a step back to face our group, "I'll be going then. Have a good night in case we won't see each other later."

She made a quick wave, told her mom she loved her, and scurried away.

"Thank you for looking after her."

Maria had approached us and hold out her hand. For some reason I had expected her to bow, but that probably was due to all the Isekais being written by Japanese people. I wondered for a split-second if maybe I was hit by a truck, but given I was living on the fifth floor that was highly unlikely.

Or maybe my dad has finally gone nuts and killed me.

Aurelia firmly grasped Maria's hand and answered: "Don't sweat it. After all we are here to help."

"Of course. Now, would you mind eating dinner? It would be on the house."

I wondered if she wanted to compensate for something.

"No, you don't have to-"

"Yes, with pleasure!"

Raynard and I accepted the offer the same time the princess tried to decline it. Past experiences told me to always accept gifts from strangers, or you would regret it. I figured maybe Raynard was the same, although I didn't know much about his background.

Though wasn't his brother a historian or something?

...

Hmm, that's no guarantee for having money though.

Anyway, brushing that thought aside, food was on its way and we decided to have a little team conference about how to proceed.

Raven was there too.

"How did you know we-"

"I smelled you."

“That’s disgusting. Please, continue,” Aurelia said, though that second statement was directed at Shelly.

“I think after dinner we should go get some rest. Especially you, Nathan.”

“Oh great, doing nothing is one of my few talents. I’ll be fine.”

Raynard and Aurelia chuckled while Shelly looked at me as if she expected better of me.

“But yeah, I guess we should sit down.” I motioned awkwardly towards an empty table, flinching after realizing, maybe I shouldn’t move my arm around to much.

“Maybe you should see a medic,” Aurelia commented.

“You mean the priest?” Raynard suggested jokingly, making me chuckle.

“For real though, I think it’s nothing serious. As long as we change those bandages every couple hours I should be fine. I mean the bleeding has basically stopped. I think. My arm is numb actually.”

We talked on like this for a couple more minutes, until our dinner came. After quickly finishing our food, Maria handed us some tea to accompany our digestion ... oh, and our discussion of course.

“We should consider our next step,” Shelly suggested.

“Well, I think, we should try to catch the culprit in the act,” Aurelia proposed.

“Agreed. Considering we haven’t made any progress so far, this seems to be our best bet,” Shelly confirmed.

“So, what? We’re gonna stay up the night and watch the graveyard?” I asked.

“Keep it low, dude,” Raynard hissed to stop me from speaking to loudly. “Why are we even discussing this here? Anyone could hear us,” he spoke into the group.

He was right. I mean theoretically ... Normally the general mumbling that by now had settled in, would drown out our conversation for most people in the room. Unless someone decided to eavesdrop.

As I was sitting against the wall, I decided to cautiously look around the room.

“Well, if someone would be spying on us, it wouldn’t matter, whether we are sitting here, or in our rooms,” Shelly explained. “In fact, I think it is more likely to get away unheard in a room full of talking people.”

“Yeah, what she said,” I simply commented.

“But yeah,” she kept her voice low, “for this we should definitely sneak out after dark. I don’t want to get on the bad side of those people, so after we finished our tea, we should maybe get a nap, and then do our thing. Got it?”

We nodded in unison.

“Oh, wow, that’s nasty.”

Raven was changing my bandages in our room. I was sitting on the bed, while Raven was sitting on the floor.

“Please don’t try to lick it alright?” I said, followed by a suppressed hiss as the bloodstained bandages peeled of my healing wound.

“Wow, this looks awful,” I commented again.

“I think it’s beautiful.”

I wondered for a moment whether Raven said that because of the spell that was controlling him, or because he probably had a past of slaughtering people.

I wanted to say something, but instead I just let out a meaningless groan.

The fact that I was the only one speaking was deeply unsettling, which is why I was unable to shut up. Raynard has already zoned out on his bed, and Raven was uncomfortably quiet for some reason.

“Is everything ... alright?” I asked him awkwardly.

“Well ... no, but for the sake of the argument let’s pretend I said yes.”

“Well, then for the sake of the argument let’s pretend you didn’t say that last bit.” I tried not to sound bitter, but I wasn’t quite sure if I managed to do it.

“Well, I had a lot of time to think lately and everything is so ... strange. I thought about what happened over the last week or two. And I realized I barely spared a thought about what happened before we met. My sister is basically in jail, and I’m just running around like all that never happened. I don’t think I really changed from before. I still have the urge to do unspeakable things to those who oppose me, but you don’t want me to do such things, so I don’t do them. It all makes perfect sense to me ... except it doesn’t. I’m just ... confused.”

Guilt washed over me as he spoke. I could tell him the reason for his confusion obviously, but what would happen after that? I did not want to tell him. I really enjoyed things how they were at the moment. It was selfish, but I couldn’t imagine how it would be if he wasn’t under basically my control. I was under control. I had someone I didn’t want to leave my side. Because that’s what would always happen. Because before, I never had control.

“Look, you are happy now, aren’t you?” I asked him.

He nodded.

“You should not challenge your happiness. Or you might lose it. And you wouldn’t want that, would you?”

He shook his head.

“Just because you have the power, it doesn’t mean you should use it recklessly, or you’ll regret it.”

How ironic.

“I don’t know, how your life was with your sister, but you have been given another chance to lead a different life. So you should take it. Or ... well, don’t. But if you have decided that the way things are right now aren’t for you, and you’ll get back to your old life ... this time there won’t be any turning back, alright?”

He smiled at me, I blushed realizing everything I just said.

“I know, someone like me giving advice to someone with your experience ...”

“That was actually really cool.”

“Of course it was,” I smiled gleefully.

“All done,” Raven said, after finishing my bandages, I barely noticed anything, while talking. The burning slowly crept back, before subsiding due to some paste applied to it.

“We should get some rest as well,” I said, before laying on my side.

Raven put out the light and also got onto the bed, again hugging me from behind, being mindful of not touching the bandages accidentally.

Sometime later I jolted out of sleep, freeing myself from Ravens grip.

Weren’t we supposed to keep watch or something?

I glanced over to Raynard's bed, which was empty. I figured they must have already gone without us.

I walked over to the only window in the room, and looked outside. After scanning the area for a while I spotted Raynard hiding alone in some bushes.

I got back to my side of the bed and picked up my bag containing the grimoire.

Hey, do you know, where Shelly is?

[Above.]

Above? Ahh, probably on the roof, or the attic or something.

I picked up my scarf that was thrown on the floor carelessly and wrapped it around my shoulders and arms, like some sort of improvised poncho.

I snuck out the room, took a right turn and went upstairs. This floor did not have any more stairs, instead a small ladder lead to a hatch, which led me to the rooftop, where Shelly was. She laid on her stomach glancing through a pair of binoculars, her elbows propped on a bag.

I ducked, and tip-toed toward her, before also laying down.

"Hey."

"Nathan." She looked up and asked, "what time is it?"

"What is time?" I asked, mainly because so far I haven't really noticed anyone having a portable way of measuring time. Well, except for the grimoire of course.

"For real though, why did you leave me behind? I feel heartbroken," I tried to radiate the same energy as the crying emoji as much as possible, but I am pretty sure, my sarcasm took over.

"Oh, we didn't leave you behind. I woke up Raynard for watch when the sun set, but the princess is still sleeping as well." She turned back to look through the binoculars. "I'm glad you didn't just walk out to him though." She pointed at Raynard hiding.

"Yeah, I'm not that dumb." I also turned to look over the edge of the roof. "So, anything yet?"

"Nothing. I'm feeling that this is a waste of time. If you don't mind I'll hand those over to you, and go catch some sleep," she said, as she handed me her binoculars.

"Ah, could you maybe bring me some new bandages and this medicine, whatever it is? They should be somewhere next to my bed."

"Sure thing. I'll send the princess up," she said, standing up, and making her way back inside. A sudden gust of wind made me shiver, and I took the binoculars, from where Shelly laid them on the floor.

Well at least with you I won't be lonely, right?

[...]

I sighed.

After a couple of minutes of trying not to completely doze of, a rattling came from behind me, and I turned back, to see a very ... eh, let's not dive into that description further. The princess came my way, and after also laying on the floor she handed me over the bandages.

"Thank you," I said feebly. "Have a look, would you?" I asked her as I handed over the binoculars, to which she just replied with a useless grunt.

I rolled of the bandages and took a good look at my scars. Whatever that balm was (unicorn poop probably) it was incredibly helpful. I did not look pretty, the skin around the wounds was a mess, but I did not feel any irritation whatsoever and it seems as though the scars would simply close themselves overtime. It was still painful, but now it was more like a sore muscle than being burned alive.

While I was doing my thing the princess asked me: “How do you do? With that injury?”

I was thinking about whether to reply honestly or sarcastically, but I ended up just saying, “Well ...” and flailing my arms.

She chuckled, and sat up laying the binoculars to her side. “Let me help.”

I’ve already applied the weird paste, so she took the bandages and began to wrap them around my arms.

While I was watching her, I desperately looked for a topic to talk about.

“You know, back home I had a friend. Unbelievable, I know. We would always sneak out together at night. This whole situation just reminded me of that.”

“Don’t tell, me *I* remind you of her,” a cheeky smile showed on her face.

“First of all, it actually was a girl, so lucky guess, second, no not at all,” I chuckled. “I suppose you have a similar personality, but when it comes to looks you’re not at all alike.”

“... home ... huh?”

I exhaled heavily through my nose.

“Yeah.”

After a short while I said. “You know, since coming here, I barely spared a thought, about going back. At least ... it is not a priority at the moment. I like it here. If there is no way back, I would have no problem with that. Do you think that is weird?” I asked her.

“Not at all,” she said, as she finished up the bandages and looked up. “Actually, I feel similarly. We probably have different upbringings, I take it, but I’m actually quite glad to be where I am right now. Which is not at home. My family ... is quite difficult, so I’m really thankful I don’t have to be around them all the times.”

We looked at each other wide-eyed.

“Erm, I hoped that helped?”

I snickered. “It did. Thanks.”

“That’s good. If you want to talk, don’t hesitate to talk to me.”

“That’s not my strength. Talking about myself anyway.”

She chuckled as well. “I get that. Anyway,” she stood up. “Time to relieve Raynard from his duty. Have a good night.”

“You too.” I turned back to my goggles. I heard the hatch close, and after a while I spotted the princess through my glasses. She also looked for me and after a while directed a peace sign at me. I grinned and returned the gesture.

The night ended uneventfully, and we left our positions as soon as the sun rose.

Chapter 20 – We don't solve the mystery in this one

Oh boy, was I tired.

I was pretty used to staying up all night, so I thought nothing of watching the graveyard for a couple of hours and then just going about my day. What I did not consider however was that napping for a couple of hours would completely disrupt my sleep pattern and also that I wouldn't be simply able to sleep through most of my classes, cause guess what! I didn't have any classes, genius!

Also the healing process of my arm was quite a bit tiring. I might have caught a fever, I felt like shit.

I did not mention that however, when I met up with the others. Why would I. It would only piss them off, probably, useless as I am.

The sun was just shining its first rays upon the village, when I signaled the princess to leave her position, before anyone would wake up. I wondered whether they'd have roosters to wake them up or anything like that. My suspicion was confirmed when I saw Aurelia coming up the stairs to our floor and I could hear a crow in the distance. They probably had a different name for roosters, maybe they weren't even roosters, only something similar, but the grimoire would translate it as rooster, because these animals basically function the same.

But enough on roosters.

The princess greeted me and I tried to also wish her a good morning, but I only managed to make some weird croaking.

I cleared my throat and instead brought up a weak "Mornin' ..."

"Hoo, that did not sound great."

"I'm fine," I replied, my voice slowly returning.

"Should we wake the others up, or ...? Because I am hungry," the princess replied.

"No need," Raynard who just left our room said.

"Yep, we are up as soon as the sun rises," Shelly now also appeared from the girls' room.

How awfully convenient.

"Food," Raynard said.

"Yes, food," we all agreed, and thus went downstairs.

"What about Raven?" I asked the other boy.

"Oh, he's awake. He was looking out the window, when I woke up, quite brooding."

"Oh, for the love of ... What is that smell?" Shelly, who was a bit ahead of us, interrupted us.

"Yeah, I also noticed it, when I came upstairs," Aurelia said. "Thought it was the animals outside, doing their thing."

I arrived downstairs and now also noticed it. I quickly covered my nose. It smelled like death, not that I knew what that smelled like.

"Good morning, every- Oh lord, what is that smell?" Maria who came from the kitchen now also asked.

"Huh, so its definitely not normal," Aurelia realized and now also decided to cover her nose, while also going around the room, seemingly looking for the source of the smell.

Everyone followed suit.

The foul smell made my head spin, so I decided to just open the door and let some fresh air in.

"Oh Jesus," I muttered. I should maybe have stayed in bed.

I turned around and leaned against the door, watching everyone as they walked around in confusion. After a couple of seconds, I decided to rejoin them and then spotted a door, next to the stairs.

“What’s in there?” I asked, pointing at the door.

“Oh, that’s the door to the basement, where we store our foods.”

“Maybe something’s rotten?” Raynard questioned.

“Actually, Misha is responsible for checking on the food every morning ... speaking of which, where is she?” Maria looked at every one of us in a very unsettling fashion.

“Well, maybe she’s in the basement?” Raynard said, and without an ounce of hesitation moved to open the door.

As soon as he pressed down the handle to open it a crack, he immediately recoiled, covering his mouth and trying to suppress a gag.

“Holy- guh, that’s disgusting,” he gasped. Everyone immediately covered their faces, as the smell was wafting from inside the basement.

“I’ll go first,” Shelly said, moving towards the door.

So that was unsettling, even for her.

We all stayed close behind her.

A staircase led to the bottom of the basement. From somewhere inside a light illuminated the space sparsely.

Shelly stepped down, followed by Raynard, Aurelia and then me. Shelly ducked under a low-hanging beam and turned her attention towards the middle of the room.

“Misha?!” she suddenly exclaimed, and rushed down the remainder of the stairs.

“What?” Maria exclaimed at the mention of her daughter and we all quickly descended the rest of the stairs, to not be overrun by her sheer force.

Now I could see her as well, she was kneeling on the floor, a candle behind her. She had her back turned to us, and something was laying in front of her. It looked like some sort of package, but it was too dark for me to completely grasp what it was.

“Misha, what’s going on here?” her mother called out to her.

As if waiting for this trigger, a sudden shiver overcame Misha and she began to murmur something that was without a doubt a spell. Everyone either drew their weapons, or took on a fighting stand, or both.

“Maria, you should call the pastor!” Shelly exclaimed, while making a repellent gesture with her hand.

Maria at first reacted with confusion, before stumbling backwards a bit and finally climbing up the stairs.

“Misha, what are you doing?” Aurelia finally was the first one to say something. But Misha did not even seem to acknowledge her presence, instead continuing her murmur.

And then it occurred to me. That thing in front of her was a body bag.

“Guys, what is that spell, she is using?”

[This spell is unknown.]

The moment the grimoire said that, I knew, that whatever response I would be getting probably wouldn’t be satisfactory.

“I have no idea,” Shelly confirmed.

“Well, I’m sure not letting her get away with it,” Aurelia said, and quickly leaped toward Misha, pressing one of her fists gently against her temple.

“Misha, whatever you’re doing, stop it, or I might hurt you.”

As if prompted Misha stopped her chant. “It’s too late,” she said. The princess wasn’t the reason, she stopped. She had finished the spell.

“It worked ...” Misha whispered in awe.

What followed were erratic movements from the bag in front of the two girls. At first it was just a faint rustle, getting stronger and faster, like a human trying to break the surface of the water before drowning.

Still not acknowledging Aurelia’s presence she slowly reached for the bag and opened it gently through its content’s struggling motions.

“It’s Sasha ...”

“What?!” Aurelia exclaimed in a mix of surprise and shock.

The silhouettes of two limbs arose from the sack, at first barely more than sticks in my eye, though I soon realized they were arms. They slowly reached for Misha’s face.

“Welcome back ...”

I couldn’t see the princess’s face, but she was without a doubt frozen in shock at what was going on. The disgusting smell was by far our smallest concern.

Sasha’s corpse reached for her sister’s face. Misha probably was overwhelmed by the result her spell achieved, because I could not imagine how she thought of the corpse’s stiff movements as not creepy.

Which was why she let the corpse clench her fingers around her throat.

Sasha’s corpse had started to choke Misha, and while slowly raising from the body bag she pushed her on the ground.

It took our surprised screams for Aurelia to finally make a move and with one punch she broke through both arms of the withering corpse. It probably tried to scream in pain but instead just came a pained gurgle, while it flailed around with its broken arms.

I ignored the pounding in my head and now jolted towards the girls. I had no intention of fighting, but at least I could ensure Misha’s safety, by dragging her away. It took some force to break open the fingers that were still locked around her neck with the intention to kill her. It was the most disgusting sensation ever, to feel the bones breaking, but my mind was so fuzzy it was easy to ignore it.

Misha who was now gasping for air looked on in shock, as she watched her sisters corpse stand against the wall of the basement, her eyes simply ogling at each of us, one by one, without any other part of her body even flinching.

“Ugh, come at me you filthy monster ...” Aurelia said under her breath, but instead of actually waiting for it to move, she just punched the corpse square in the face. I expected blood to splatter everywhere due to the sheer force of her punch, but instead, it just cracked and it was more like throwing a vase against a wall.

It dropped onto it’s knees and then completely onto the floor.

“Is everyone alright?” someone shouted from upstairs, it was the priest, who now also entered the basement, together with a bunch of young men, who looked about Misha’s age. It got pretty cramped in here.

“Wh- what on earth is this thing?” one of the men said, and I directed my attention back towards, then princess, then the corpse.

It was now standing again, though it clearly had problems keeping its balance.

“What the-” Aurelia definitely was done with this crap, which is why Shelly dashed past her, drawing a short sword, to cleanly cut off the corpse’s smashed head, which dropped to the floor with a thud, shortly followed by the rest of the body.

No-one was daring to breathe for a hot second, before the silence was interrupted by pastor Ignacio. “Bring the remains of this thing out of here, and burn them! And then lock **her** up.”

His statement was accompanied by a deathly glare, both directed at Misha, who was leaning against my arms.

“I am disappointed in you.”

Misha’s heavy look met the floor, as she did not dare to look anyone in the eye.

Chapter 21 – Something smells foul (no pun intended)

Misha was put into jail. That being the church obviously, because everything in this damn town was managed by the church.

Everything about this situation seemed screwed up.

Did her sisters death really mess her up that bad? For her to find a spell to bring her back? She was a talented mage, so for her to actually do it seemed not to be that much of a reach. But from what I gather, necromancy was a highly experimental field, that bore barely any results in actual resurrection spells.

Sasha's corpse was burned shortly after the incident, which was probably for the best, as we saw earlier. But from an investigatory perspective they were burning our evidence.

...

Buzzfeed unsolved rules.

Man, I wish television or the Internet existed in this world. Binging reality TV shows while sick was the best, because it required just enough attention to make sure I was still alive.

It was just getting afternoon, but it was already a long day. For me because I barely had anything to do, but for the villagers ... well.

After everything was settled, we met up in the boys' room. We were still a bit shaken, or rather tensed up, by what happened this morning.

And on top of that I had barely slept and caught a fever. I was still trying to keep it a secret, at least until we came home, but I was the only one laying in bed so there goes subtlety.

"Sooooo ..." I said, because the silence was stressing me out. But then again maybe I shouldn't have said anything at all. Over the past hours I tried to wrap my head around what happened, because Misha being behind this did not make much sense. My mind was just too clouded, to pinpoint, why exactly I thought this was the case.

"Nathan," Aurelia who was seated on Raynard's bed called out for me, I simply responded by looking her in the eye. "Misha didn't return during our shift, did she?"

That's right. While we were watching the graveyard, we also automatically covered the ground between the inn and the church.

I wound back a couple of hours, but the only thing I remembered was nothing happening at all? So I nodded, and closed my eyes again.

"Well then, did she return during yours? Shelly?" She then asked.

Shelly, leaning against the wall opposite from our beds, looked over to Raynard, who was sitting next to Aurelia, before shaking her head in response.

"That's odd," she said after another couple seconds of uncomfortable silence. "She could have returned during the early morning hours, maybe?"

"No, because how would she have gotten her sisters corpse into the basement?" Raynard asked. "And even so, we would have found her way earlier, considering the, ugh, pungent smell."

"Yeah, and also, where are the other corpses in that case?" Aurelia agreed, immediately proposing, "Also burnt?"

"But she couldn't possibly have hidden them in the basement the entire time?"

Having reached a dead end, the conversation came to a halt.

“What about the time period between when you changed shift?” Raven suddenly joined the conversation.

Me and Shelly looked at each other and nearly simultaneously shook our heads. “Nah, that’s unlikely. I mean, at least one person was watching,” she replied, and relaxed myself, trying to remember the past few days.

Wow, I was tired.

“Maybe there was something else, like a backdoor, or maybe a secret exit, or anything?”

Secret exit.

Fuck sleep.

I immediately jolted upward, forcing myself to ignore my brain crashing against my inner skull.

“Secret exit, that’s it, no, what did she call it ...” I thought back, to what Misha told us in Blackwood Forest.

In that moment, it also seemed to click in Aurelia’s and Raynard’s mind.

“Emergency exit!” We all exclaimed at the same time.

“Wha-?” Raven said, but was immediately interrupted by Shelly enthusiastic “That’s right!”

I decided to explain it to him.

“Misha said, all houses in this town are connected by some sort of underground tunnel system. She must have used the tunnels to go from the church to the inn, without being seen.”

“The entrance must be hidden somewhere in the basement,” Raynard proposed.

“Probably behind some of the shelves on the walls,” Aurelia added.

“And then maybe we can find the other corpses.”

Raynard frowned. “Hold your horses.”

“What?” I tried not to sound too amused about this unfitting expression, because from his tone I knew he wanted to say something serious.

“The church?” He simply asked and made a gesture that was supposed to tell us how obvious the answer was. “Why would Misha hide **corpses**, inside the church? What if the pastor has been in on this after all?”

“Yeah, something has been smelling foul for a while now ... no pun intended.”

Ohhh, pun fully intended lmao, how long have I been wanting to say that now.

“Hufufu, the teacher-student duo being in all this all along, I like it,” Shelly said, without questioning it that much.

I thought about it for a second. I mean, two brains think better than one, so teaming up to execute this seemingly impossible spell made sense. But wouldn’t the pastor want to help her? And if they had the church and tunnels as a base of operation, why would Misha use the basement for the ritual of all places? I guess, barely anyone would be entering it, compared to a church that was open for everyone.

...

Well, considering the church is also used as a jail, there definitely were some more private areas ...

Before I was able to voice my confusion, Aurelia asked, “So, are we going in there? Look for the exit?”

“What else is there to do?”, Shelly asked a rhetorical question. “But we need to be careful. The pastor’s still nearby, we should try not to raise his suspicion.”

And as simple as that, we went downstairs, leaving only Raven behind. Again.

When we entered the room, no one was there, except for Maria, occupying a table in the middle of the room, taking turns between staring out the window and into her steaming cup of tea.

The four of us just looked on in silence, not having expected to run into her.

“So, should we just enter, or ask for her permission?” I tried to ask as quietly as possible.

“I feel bad for her ...” Aurelia muttered.

“Well, her daughter did who knows what, so ...” Shelly figured, and I just glanced at her, confused. I looked back at Maria, contemplating my life choices before stepping forward, and taking a seat opposite to her.

“Hello, there,” I said awkwardly, and after fumbling for words, “thank you for your hospitality.”

Her expression bore only confusion, and probably not quite knowing what to say herself, she replied, “I can’t believe Misha has done something like this, just for Sasha ...”

“Jesus, you need to have more faith in your daughter.”

“Jesus ...?”

Oop, I hope I didn’t accidentally introduce this world to Christianity. Don’t need another world swarmed by bigots.

“Look, I can’t believe Misha did this either. In fact I don’t. I don’t think Misha did what she did, because she was some crazed lunatic unable to cope with her sisters death. Which is, why we’ll be entering your basement to try to find out the truth.”

“What, but the pastor already searched everything.”

I was about to make some comment about how the pastor was only searching for what would help him, but I couldn’t just undermine her faith in the person that seemed to have gained everyone’s trust. So instead I just said, “He might have overlooked something. Won’t take too long, alright? We’ll be gone before you know it.”

“Of course, just take your time.”

I stood up, and walked towards the other who were already entering the basement.

“Also, maybe I have just really low standards, but I think you’re an amazing mother,” I said, hoping it would help her, but maybe also, because I was a bit jealous.

Maria just chuckled in response.

The basement was ... well, not really different from this morning, just way less crowded.

“So, let’s rearrange this place!” Raynard said, semi-enthusiastically lifting a fist into the air.

“Actually, let’s not,” Shelly said earning a confused look from the boy.

“What, why?” I asked.

“Becaaaauuse! You have a handy device that is sure to find secret passages in your area.”

“Something about this phrasing does not instill confidence in me.”

I took the grimoire from my bag, opening it in my palm and said, “So, are there any single- I mean, secret passages in my area?”

Talking to it out loud was odd, but excluding people from telepathic conversations was odder. Also rude.

An arrow bled through the spread page, pointing at the wall right from me. When I turned towards the direction it pointed at, it was as if the ink wandered across the page for adjustment.

I walked towards said wall, swinging the grimoire left and right, like a metal detector, until I was sure I found the right position.

“It’s behind this shelf,” I said, and turned around to the others. Their eyes were wide, and I made a few indistinct motions, indicating they should push the shelf away.

After that the arrow changed again, skewing, becoming smaller in the front and wider in the back, indicating depth.

Do I even have to tell you, that I lowered myself onto the ground?

[No.]

Shut up, wasn’t talking to you.

[I have to notify you, that the severity of your fever has assumed alarming proportions.]

The arrow was now pointing at certain brick in stonewall.

I gave it a gentle nudge.

Then a not so gentle nudge.

It moved.

I put the Grimoire on the floor and used both hands to move the block forward, pushing it through the wall. I realized it had completely separated itself from the rest of the wall, but I couldn’t really recognize, what was on the other side, as it was pitch black in there. I pushed the block some more until my arms were completely on the other side of the wall.

The hole from the block was large enough for a human to fit in. It was somewhat bigger than what you’d expect a ventilation shaft, which is the usual candidate for stealthy sneaking.

What even am I saying.

“Luminae,” I whispered, because that was one of two spells that I knew, and it probably was more useful than creating a whirlwind.

The light coming from my finger tips illuminated a passageway in front of me. Its wall was made of the same stones as the basement’s, and it got quite the early 90s first person RPG vibe. I’m talking Daggerfall style dungeons.

Only without all its pixelated charm.

“There’s a passageway ya’ll,” I said, pushing myself through the hole. Doing that and keeping the lights on at the same time proved a tiny bit difficult, but I managed somehow. I pushed the stone aside, and was shortly followed by Aurelia, Raynard and lastly Shelly.

“So, we’re just going ahead now, right?” Raynard asked timidly.

“I mean, do you have any other options?” Aurelia retorted, to which he had no answer.

“Follow me,” I said, “in case there’s a breach, my grimoire knows the way.”

“How convenient,” Raynard replied.

“I know, right?”

Chapter 22 – Misha’s Truth

“The grimoire led us to a dead end, great!”

[Push the upper stone in the middle of the wall.]

Obviously the tunnel wouldn’t just end in a door leading to the church, that would be too easy.

I stood on my toes and tried pushing the heavy stone through the wall. Of course the one injured person had to do the handiwork.

“Wait, let me do this,” Aurelia, who was a bit taller than me offered, not waiting for a response.

“Okay, that’s it, I can’t reach deeper,” she said, after a short while.

“Give me a leg-up,” I told her, and she helped me reach inside the hole in the wall, where I completely pushed the stone through the wall.

Finally I crawled through the narrow shaft and peaked outside. It was like a small office, only ... I’d say more religious, but what do I know about religion in this world. The furnishment seemed pretty expensive though.

I made sure no-one was near, and just dragged myself into the room.

I took a bit of time to get my breathing back under control and then looked around.

It was what you’d expect from a priest’s office. A desk with two chairs on each side, papers lying around, books, probably some sort of religious scriptures locked behind glass doors inside a cabinet.

I stepped towards the door and looked through the keyhole. On the other side I spotted an altar, but interestingly there weren’t any benches in front of it. The opposite wall also had another door. The building appeared to be empty, and I was just about to tell the other’s that the coast was clear, when I noticed Shelly climbing through the hole, as well as Aurelia and Raynard standing behind me.

“So?” Aurelia asked.

“We’re actually inside the church ...” Raynard muttered.

“It seems we’re alone, which means we should be able to snoop around for a couple of minutes,” I replied.

“Any idea, where to look? And what for?” Aurelia asked.

“I think we should look for Sasha,” I answered. “If she’s with the pastor, we might still get some useful information from her.”

“What makes you think, she would answer any question?” Shelly challenged.

“Look, she tried to bring her sister back, but I hope she ... sort of ... snapped back, after seeing what her spell actually did.”

“What if the pastor has some kind of leverage against her?” Shelly asked.

“What kind of leverage would he have?” I retorted.

“Yeah, I mean if he had any leverage on her at all, it was probably the prospect of bringing her sister back,” Raynard backed up. “I mean, in that case it would make sense for him to lock her up.”

Shelly scratched the bridge of her nose in thought, but after thinking about it for a bit replied, “Alright. Guess the only way to find out, is to actually talk to her.”

“So, does anyone know, where the jail could be?” I asked.

The other’s looked at each other and then answered: “The basement.”

“Hm,” I simply answered with an affirming expression. I turned around and opened the office door. I quickly crossed over to the other door and stepped through, only then realizing that the others weren’t following me at all.

I threw my hands in the air to basically say, *what the fuck, why aren't you coming?* They jogged over the empty choir shortly after.

The door led to some sort of storage room, the contents of which we, or rather I simply ignored. The Grimoire showed me the layout of the church, so I sort of knew where to go, though the rooms themselves weren’t named on the map.

However, the basement map showed three square shaped rooms of exactly the same size and I figured they must be cells. All we needed to do was find the stairs leading downwards.

According to the map they were in this room. Well, I figured already, since they weren’t in the office, and the main room was unlikely to contain them. There probably was some name for that room we learned in school, but whatever.

It took me some strained looks between the map and the floor of this room, before I spotted a hatch on the floor. I staggered towards it, and threw it open, before climbing a ladder downwards.

A ladder, no stairs, huh? So the pastor got all the good furniture but the architects couldn’t afford fucking stairs. Whatever.

I slid down, skipping most rungs. Not that the basement was that far underground.

I landed on both of my feet and stumbled backwards against a wall after impact, resting against the cold stone, while waiting for my friends.

Huh, friends. I think that’s the first time I called them like that. Not out loud, but we might get there some time.

Aurelia, Raynard and lastly Shelly followed me, in that order. Seems like we already had our distinct way, of going through narrow passageways where only one person at a time fits in.

“Hooo, the air is bad,” Raynard commented and stepped aside to make room for Shelly.

I said nothing in response. That’s kinda what I’ve been doing lately. Man, I’m pretty useless.

I let Shelly take the lead, trailing behind the group as we took a few steps into the room, where we were confronted with three cells, just like the map told me. A singular torch illuminated the room scantily.

In the one furthest from the ladder was ...

“Misha ...” someone called out and I realized it was me.

She laid in a pallet in the corner of her cell, but jumped onto her knees when she heard us.

“Wha- What are you doing here? The pastor didn’t let you see me, did he?” she asked, obviously very confused.

“No, we kinda broke into the church,” I replied deadpan. No need to hide it.

“You- What?” She looked at Shelly who just shrugged in response. “You ... haha, I can’t believe you, haha ... ha” Her shallow laugh turned sad very quick. “What do you want?” And her voice very icy.

“Answers, mostly,” I replied. “Money, food, sleep and eternal happiness would be nice also.”

Misha flat out ignored that last part.

“I believe you mostly know your answers.”

“Mostly,” Raynard repeated.

“That’s the point,” I said.

“Look, I don’t know what I’m supposed to tell you. I wanted Sasha back and that’s basically it.”

Aurelia suppressed a few amused curses and then responded, “You know how convincing you sound, right? Like, not at all?”

“I know, but what’s the point? You won’t be able to do anything, anyway.”

“Do anything against what?” Shelly questioned.

Misha looked at our group her expression growing more tired. She massaged her temples and answered, “Against an undead army.”

Various questions formed on our lips but none of them actually were spoken out loud, so Misha just elaborated further.

“Look, you should have been gone by now, and I advise you do so, after I tell you what I know. That spell I used on that corpse – who for the record I’m pretty sure wasn’t my sister – the pastor is planning to use it on dozen’s of corpses he has hidden somewhere underground. I don’t know why, but he is planning an attack on the village. What I did, was only sort of acting as a test run, to see if the spell worked, how the undead behaved and most importantly to find a scapegoat for his doing to give the villagers a false sense of security.”

“That’s a hilariously terrible plan,” Shelly interrupted her.

“It is!”

“So, why did you do it? Help him?” I asked.

“Because he promised me safety from the attack. I’m a coward that’s all. Since my sister died I ... have been hyperaware of my own mortality and it’s sort of messing with me.”

I could relate to that sort of, and I somehow wanted to say something comforting to her, but–

“That’s ...” Shelly stepped forward and grabbed one of the bars, “Nothing to be ashamed of.”

Misha who most of the time was avoiding eye contact suddenly looked up.

“As a police officer I am constantly surrounded by death and at first it’s ... rough. But then you realize that there’s so much more to life, than just you and the fact that one day you’ll die. You realize that there’s other people and that living with other people helps you not think of the bad things in life. If that makes sense ...”

It did. It was something I’ve been thinking about a lot, but never consciously been aware of and especially not something I ever took at face value.

“What I wanted to say – there’s people out there who need you. Who need to know the truth. Truth that only you can provide. That needs to get out there, to save lives. So please, don’t hide. Help us.”

“Shelly ...” Aurelia and Raynard were impressed with that little speech. Me too, to be honest. It spoke to me, but most importantly she completely seemed to have changed her opinion about Misha.

“But, what can I do? I’m stuck in here,” she responded.

“That’s not a problem,” Raynard and I said in unison and stepped to the side to make room for Aurelia, who already took a step forward.

She grabbed the metal bars two at a time, and slowly squeezed them together, bending them in the process. I thought my vision had gone awry, because the bars started changing colors. It appeared she was actually melting the bars with her mere hands.

When she let go she had formed a passage large enough for Misha to fit through. It got darker in the room again, the melting metal bars having lit up the room a bit.

Misha stepped through the bars, trying not to touch them as they were probably still hot as the sun.

“You are definitely an amazing mage ...”

Aurelia wasn't quite sure how to respond.

“So, what's next?” Raynard asked.

“We need to warn the villagers,” Misha said.

“We also should look for the undead army,” Shelly said.

“When the pastor told me about his plan, he actually led me through this passage,” Misha answered, pointing at a wall that was a not very well hidden door. The lever next to it was pretty much a dead giveaway.

“It's quite the labyrinth in there, only the pastor knows the way.”

“Well actually,” I said.

“The kids will manage this,” Shelly assured her. “I think we should be the one to warn the villagers, while the other's try to stop the army, before they can march out,” she said with two questioning nods directed first at Misha, then at us.

“The pastor should still be outside, I would have noticed if he opened the passageway. You should hurry nonetheless, who knows when he puts his plan into action, but be careful not to let him find you.”

“He's a terrific mage I take it?” I asked.

“He managed to bring back the dead. No one before him has done something like this to that extent,” Shelly said, and it was enough of an answer.

“In that case we should be going,” Raynard said, Aurelia and I nodded simultaneously.

“Good, take care,” Shelly confirmed, and then took off towards the ladder.

Raynard, Aurelia and I stepped towards the wall, and Aurelia pulled the lever. The stone wall pushed itself inside and against the right wall, like a gigantic door. Over the years it had left marks on the floor, although it did not make a single sound.

Well, magic, am I right?

We looked at the black passageway in front of us and then took off.

Time was running short.

Chapter 23 – The Terramorta Army

Thanks to the grimoire navigating the underground labyrinth was just a matter of time. Time we weren't eager to waste.

Each path ended with a split. It was hard to believe anyone had the patience to design this clusterfuck. I wondered if they actually filled the wrong ways up with traps, though really, the labyrinth was one single trap.

We hadn't any torches with us, not that there were any torch holders for that matter, so I used you-know-which-spell. I tried chanting it without actually chanting it, but that did not work well. My concentration faded and it was really hard to sustain the spell the entire time. But I needed to get better at magic, so I did my best.

I don't know how long it took for us until we finally reached our destination. It felt like an hour, but it could have well been longer or shorter than that. My perception of time was basically non-existent at this point and with no sun to indicate the time of day, it became even harder. Also we did not talk much. I just led the others where the grimoire told me to go and that was it.

Maybe they talked to me, but I didn't realize?

Not sure.

Anyway, we seemed to have reached the exit. Up front was another left turn, seemingly without any additional junctions.

I jogged a bit ahead and glanced around the corner, to make sure no one was there.

My heart almost leaped out of my chest when I spotted dozens of dark figures filling up a large chamber that was only barely illuminated by my own spell.

What the ...

I slowly rounded the corner approached the nearest one of those ... things. It was almost like a statue, standing on a small pedestal, making it just one head taller than me. I tried to light up its face, but almost jumped back having barely looked at it.

The decaying process was undeniable.

It reminded me of one of those creepy faces you'd see in a screamer video, or on the thumbnails of Halloween themed videos. I hated those.

Raynard and Aurelia followed behind, and Aurelia walking towards an actual torch holder, when she was interrupted by Raynard.

"Don't," he said. "We shouldn't leave any traces. Also we don't know if anything in here might accidentally activate the spell."

"It won't, dingus," I said to have an opportunity to clear my throat. I realized afterwards, that it maybe sounded a bit rude. Well, I wasn't in a good mood, so whatever. "We saw Misha use the spell, it was simply triggered by a chant." Wow, I sounded like a bossy douche. Sorry.

"But we don't know if there isn't another way of triggering the spell. Also it could be that he engraved the spell into the torches to activate them upon burning."

"That's stupid, why would you use a torch for anything else than light or fire?" Aurelia commented.

"Well," I waved my glowing finger, "there's magic."

I raised said finger and tried to intensify the glow but I was reaching my limit.

The way they way arranged actually reminded me of an army. Actually ...

Wasn't there like some sort of underground chamber with stone soldiers? In our world that is.

Ah, the Terracotta army, right.

Let's call these here the Terramorta army.

That sounds stupid and doesn't make a whole lot of sense.

They are under the ground though ...

I hate it when I have thoughts.

"So, what are we doing about these bad boys?"

"Yeah, what could we actually be doing about them."

The princess cracked her fingers and that actually answered the question.

She took a wide punch at the corpse nearest to her and ...

"Ouch! What the heck?!" she shouted holding her fist. It had crashed against the corpse with a hard thud. Needless to say, she did not make a dent.

"What was that?" I asked curiously.

"That must have been like some sort of protective spell?" Raynard said, though his tone implied he wasn't quite sure either.

"Yeah, seems so," he muttered more to himself than anyone else after kneeling down and taking a look at the pedestal.

"That's also why they are able to actually stand. I could try to dissolve it, but it'd probably take ... time." He sighed.

"What's the problem?" I asked.

"It's just, I don't think I'll be quick enough. Especially if I have to do it for all of the bodies. I need to understand the exact spell, the priest used, his magic signature as well as be able to infuse more mana into this spell, than he actually used to create it. I probably won't be able to do it before he comes back."

"In that case maybe we should wait?" Aurelia proposed. "He probably needs to dissolve his spell anyway to get his army out there so maybe we should just let him do it and then sort-of-but-not-really ambush him."

"We can't possibly overpower him," I threw in.

"We don't need to overpower him," Aurelia retorted. "We just need to try and damage his army as much as possible and buy the villagers some time."

I looked over to Raynard, asking him for his opinion.

"It's our best bet."

"Okay," I gave in, "but maybe we first should look around for alternatives. Maybe there's a ... main switch or something we could use."

"I doubt we find anything like that, but if it comforts you ..." Raynard agreed.

As usual I took a general look around the room ... although, chamber was more fitting. I mean it wasn't small, by no means, but it just looked like what you'd expect from a chamber.

Some chamber-esque qualities.

Like walls.

And possibly torture devices I wasn't able to discern at the moment.

Also I realized there was a door. A gate, to be more precise.

I walked towards it, focusing on the symbols surrounding it ...

"Guys, I think that's the gate we saw in the forest."

"What?" Raynard appeared next to me. "I see your point, but those are completely different symbols than the gate in the forest had."

I took another close look at the symbols, and I realized I could read them.

“Adora, god of matter, hear our prayers and open thy gate, open thy gate to hear our prayers. That’s why I couldn’t read the symbols before, they were mirror-inverted, because they were on the other side for some reason.”

Aurelia and Raynard looked at me with the most confused expression ever.

“Whaaaaat, did you just do?” Aurelia asked me.

“Huh, I read what was carved into the stone.”

“You, what?” Raynard simply exclaimed. “You realized, you weren’t speaking our language.”

I took another look at the scripture and realized that in my mind there appeared two different ... perceptions of what stood there. It’s hard to explain. It’s similar to when you see a word, that can have two different meanings, but you need to decide mostly through context what this word’s meaning is in that context. Only, that in this case this phrase had the same meaning for me, yet the difference was ... language.

“It says ‘Adora, god of matter, hear our prayers and open thy gate, open thy gate to hear our prayers’, which is what I said, but I think in the ancient language.”

“The ancient language was said to harbor the power to warp reality itself!” Raynard exclaimed excitedly but also awestruck. “I think it was like a spell supposed to open the gate.”

“But why didn’t it work?”

[While I provide the knowledge, how they are used is still dependent on your skill.]

[You have never spoken >>the ancient language<< which is why the spell did not work.]

[You have an accent.]

“Hum, apparently I have an accent.”

“That’s it?”

I shrugged.

“Okay, so whyyy exactly is there an ancient magic gate in here?” Aurelia asked adding on to her general confusion.

“The inscription mentioned the god Adora,” Raynard explained, “maybe this gate is one of the relics left by the gods?”

“Which would make this possibly a shrine,” Aurelia concluded.

I had no idea, what all of this meant.

“So maybe the pastor used this ... ‘gods’ power to somehow do all of this?” I pointed at the mass of bodies with a swift motion.

“That would be ...” Raynard did not finish his sentence.

“Well, considering Nathan here is actually able to read these inscriptions, he might not be the only one.”

Not the only one ...

“Ugh, maybe we should discuss this, after this whole ordeal is over,” I proposed, massaging my temples in despair.

“Oh, right.”

“We know these undead are a piece of cake if you know how to deal with them, so let’s concentrate on them for now. We should hide somewhere, and wait for Pastor Ignacio to return.”

“Well, if you know how to deal with them. I have to say, that one corpse I fought against was one hard punch. Any normal person, which most of the villagers are, might have some problem

dealing with them. Not to mention, the pastor might actually boost their defense somehow,” Aurelia explained her concerns.

Right, I hadn’t thought of that at all. But what else was there to do.

“If you’ve got a better idea, please tell us,” I replied, trying not to make it sound salty.

“That’s actually quite the point she has,” Raynard agreed, “If the pastor is actually making those things invincible, we should have some sort of back up plan. One of us should go for the village to warn the others, while we try to waste time.”

“One of us?” I asked.

Oh.

“Me.”

In that moment sounds came from the corridor we left not to long ago.

Footsteps.

Aurelia cursed and we hid in a corner of the room.

Raynard suddenly grabbed our wrists and I had to suppress a shout of surprise, when pastor Ignacio rounded the corner.

He did not spot us.

[You are being affected by a cloaking spell.]

So that was it.

I did not dare to even breath.

I hoped the pastor had no way of telling we were in the room.

“My friends, colleagues and fellow citizens, the time has come.” His sudden speech made shiver, because for some reason I thought he was talking to us at first.

He was talking to his army instead. A little motivational speech, it seemed.

He took a deep breath and looked at the floor for a short second.

“Why am I even talking to you, like some narcissistic lunatic, explaining his plan to his nemesis. You know the plan. Well, you don’t really know the plan, but ... What am I doing here. All this stuff really is messing with my head.”

Then without letting even a second pass, he started the chanting. I did not know it for sure of course, but I was pretty sure it was the same chant Misha did this morning. Well, the trembling of the bodies was a dead giveaway.

I held the breath I didn’t realize I was holding in just a bit more, out of spite, but this was quite the fascinating display. It fell somewhere into the ‘that’s disturbing, please continue’ category only few things in life were able to achieve. You know, mostly it was stuff, that you’d only want to happen in fiction.

Well, this stuff just unmistakably started turning its head toward us, one after another.

I only looked around in panic, not daring to move a muscle, even though for fucks sake I just moved my fucking eyes, goddammit.

Ignacio tilted his head with a frown and held up one of his hands.

“Oh, I didn’t realize we were having visitors. I thought you’d already left.” He spoke all of this quite matter-of-factly no trace of menace to be heard.

“That’s unfortunate, but at least I now get to have a test run with my protective spell activated.” He let it sound as if we were only a mild annoyance.

“Don’t restrain yourself. After all, this army is supposed to be able to withhold armies of magicians.”

The undead ... ugh, fuck copyright – the zombies now all had turned around. Our cloaking spell was still activated, but slowly they were reaching for us, coming for us, closing in on us. They attacked us.

Chapter 24 – Don't tell me what my limits are

I should have bought weapons with the money I don't have.

I managed to instinctively defend myself from whatever tried to have a piece of me using the grimoire but it wasn't pretty.

The pastor just looked on in dismay. I showed him the finger.

Raynard has been right, the zombies actually have been infused with a spell. We tried fighting back, but were only mildly successful.

The spell used appeared to be the same one, used before they were awake. And no-one has been able to break it, so, yeah. This sucks.

"I think it's time for plan B!" I shouted through the sounds of zombies hissing.

Raynard and Aurelia were basically jumping around the room, evading the attacking horde. I couldn't do more than smacking them with my grimoire. It wouldn't be able to actually hurt them, but at least we could get some space.

"And how are we gonna do that?" Raynard asked.

"I don't know, Aurelia can't you just punch that gate open?"

"I'll try."

She jumped into the air, probably doing so by using magic and then flipped backwards midair. Her feet hit a wall behind her and she kicked herself towards the gate.

The pastor ducked away towards the side, when she soared towards the gate next to him, not making an attempt at stopping her.

She landed on both of her feet, sliding over the floor and using the momentum to ram both of her fists into the stone.

Only a loud bang and repressed curses.

The gate didn't budge.

"If you really thought you could remove one of the gates of the gods by sheer force, I'm sorry, but how reckless can you be?" The pastor mocked her, which maybe was a bad idea.

Aurelia clenched her fists.

"Look, if you think I'm pissed, you're right. If you think, you're what's pissing me off, that's also right. So please stop that mockery, it's getting you nowhere, only near my fists," she said and broke his nose.

How very sexy of her.

He backed off, somehow still retaining his balance, but bending over to let the blood drop onto the floor.

"Fuck! Ahh! What was that for?" He screamed.

"Wha- Excuse me?!" The princess now also was shouting. "What could this possibly be for, you poor excuse of a priest?" She was livid and ready for another punch.

She extended her right fist. He caught her midair.

He squeezed her fist and began pushing her back.

"You caught me off guard, I'll give you that." In a swift motion he extended his other palm forward, pushing her off using magic and then jumping back himself to get some distance between them.

They were now exchanging punches, windy blows and other sweet magical nothings, all in front of my escape plan.

“Nathan,” Raynard who was busy fending of the zombies called out to me.

“Huh?” I sort of snapped back and looked at him.

“You need to open the gate,” he said.

“But I can’t!” I exclaimed. “I already tried.”

“Yes, but that was just because you did not pronounce the spell quite right, wasn’t it?”

I just looked at him with a blank expression, shoving another zombie aside.

“Just, please, try it. If you try it as often as possible, maybe you’ll get lucky. Please, it’s the only way!”

I gave him a determined nod.

“Adora, god of matter, hear our prayers and open thy gate, open thy gate to hear our prayers.”

I began chanting.

“Adora, god of matter, hear our prayers and open thy gate, open thy gate to hear our prayers.”

This drew the pastor’s attention towards me.

“You,” his fight with Aurelia came to a sudden halt. “You speak the ancient language?”

I tried not to be irritated, and just continued chanting, trying to use various possible pronunciations.

“Adora, god of matter, hear our prayers and open thy gate, open thy gate to hear our prayers.”

[>> Adora, god of matter, hear our prayers and open thy gate, open thy gate to hear our prayers.<<]

What?

[Try to mimic it.]

Now that’s something, the grimoire actually tried to help me with the spell.

It was helpful, but also really overwhelming. I chanted, mimicked the grimoire and fought off the zombies at the same time. My head hurt.

Suddenly the pastor tore towards me. I stumbled backwards, breaking of the chanting in the process.

“Shit.”

“Oh no, you won’t!”

Aurelia launched herself against the pastor, taking him down and pinning him against the floor.

“Adora, god of matter, hear our prayers and open thy gate, open thy gate to hear our prayers.”

I kept chanting.

Adora, god of matter, hear our prayers and open thy gate, open thy gate to hear our prayers.

Adora, god of matter, hear our prayers and open thy gate, open thy gate to hear our prayers.

Adora, god of matter, hear our prayers and open thy gate, open thy gate to hear our prayers.

Adora, god of matter, hear our prayers and open thy gate, open thy gate to hear our prayers.

Until finally ...

A light seemed to erupt from the tip of my tongue, breaking the horde apart and piercing the gate on the opposite side of the room. It disappeared into particles of light.

That was it.

I shoved the zombie in front of me out of the way, and sprinted toward the gate.

I had to warn the villagers.

I glanced behind and saw a few zombies following me in my path one after another and I tried to speed up.

I reached the gate and broke into the fresh air. The sun was already setting, but that did not matter at the moment.

I looked back again and saw a few zombies having followed me outside.

Suddenly Raynard appeared in front of the gate, spreading his arms, as if to shield it from something.

“Raynard,” I shouted, because I was pretty sure, just standing in front of the gate wouldn’t work.

Until I saw the other zombies crashing against an invisible wall.

Raynard tilted his head a bit toward the side and gave me a thumbs-up.

“Hopefully this’ll buy us time,” I muttered out loud for some reason. The only ones that could hear me were the five zombies that were slowly closing in on me, while I left the clearing, and dashed through the bushes.

I tried to speed up.

Everything hurt.

My head, my legs, my back.

If this was what dying felt like, it wasn’t very pleasant. Though definitely better than being torn apart by one of those things.

If I could I’d let my legs rotate like a wheel to get some speed, but I was already at my limit.

So, are there any strategies to escape this situation?

[None.]

Don’t give me that crap! There’s gotta be something.

[Nothing.]

What?! There’s gotta be a speed spell or anything!

[...]

So there is something!

[You wouldn’t be able to use the spell without depleting all of your mana.]

Is there a chance I could reach the village in time?!

[Yes.]

How?!

[The most efficient method would be to use an aerial spell-]

Show me!

The spells information was immediately loaded into my brain.

I had only one shot at this.

The zombies were closing in.

I stretched my hand out behind me. I could feel fingers reaching out for, not-so-gently grazing my skin, probably wounding me slightly. I didn’t notice.

I gathered every inch of magic my body could provide me with into my open palm, concentrating on replicating that exact sensation th grimoire showed me.

And a burst of air left my hand, blowing away a zombie yanking my hand into the air. Not only was this spell using lots of mana it seemed to also be physically taxing, as I tried to control the stream of air.

It took a lot of effort, but after a few seconds I pushed more of my mana into blowing air from my palm, and pushed myself high into the air. When I actually surpassed the trees, I cancelled the spell, flying another dozen meters at insane speed. The headwind made my vision blurry.

[Your mana is reaching critical levels.]

I tried looking behind me to find the zombies, but my vision was so bad, I only recognized the trees and grass below me as a dark green blur.

Just after I began sinking, I concentrated on that spell again to give me another boost.

I think I could see the village and the river in the distance.

The next moments were an obscure blur. After the second boost my nose started bleeding and the grimoire notified me, that I have used up all of my mana. I think. I couldn't concentrate on the message, really, yet I somehow managed to repeatedly boost myself into the air, and each time it felt like someone stabbed my brain through the nose.

It was a steady up and down and it made me sick honestly.

That's when I spotted a commotion in the center of the village and I decided it was best to just let myself fall onto the ground.

I crash-landed on the dry earth, near the commotion that was seemingly cause by Shelly and Misha. Somehow no-one has noticed me flying towards the village, but when I landed I immediately drew all the attention to me.

"Guys, the pastor... he has... done the spell. He's coming for the village."

I tried standing up, but I realized the feeling in most of my body was gone. Honestly, I wasn't quite sure, if what I said was any more than just a weird slurring.

I saw Shelly running towards me and my vision twisted and tilted until I couldn't hold my eyes open any longer.

Chapter 25 – Meanwhile

“I can’t hold the barrier up that much longer!” Raynard shouted. He has been standing at the entrance to the underground chamber for the past few minutes, trying to hold up the barrier keeping the zombies from breaking through.

The pastor and the princess were still engaged in a fight, the former keeping the latter busy, so his army had to suffer as few losses as possible. Raynard had barely any mana left, and the undead army repeatedly attacked the barrier with their entire bodies as projectiles, to no avail. So far.

Aurelia occasionally tried breaking through this constant barrage of attacks, but the pastor barely let her form a clear thought, let alone cast a spell, other than for self-defense.

Aurelia had suspected the pastor was strong from his build, but she didn’t expect him to be this strong. At the academy even teachers could barely keep up when it came to her pure strength, after all she had been training and putting on muscle since she was a child. Maybe it was the same with the pastor, and considering he had to be at least twice her age, a difference in strength wouldn’t be surprising. However, Aurelia didn’t get how one could be this strong, while also being a formidable mage.

Every time she threw a spell at the horde he managed to dissolve it with ease.

“Tch,” she held a curse word back. Not that it mattered, no-one would pay attention. And since leaving her family to study at Ataraxia her mouth had developed a life of its own.

She ran through several possibilities on how to continue in her mind, but in the end she gave up. Because everything she thought of would lead to the same conclusion. So instead of trying to fend off the priest, while trying to attack the horde, she thought it would be best to let the monsters go. Raynard would still have some mana left so he might still be a help.

Because if she was being honest the priest posed a bigger threat than those things. After all, he wanted to use the element of surprise for his attack on the village.

I hope Nathan has reached the village by now, she thought to herself. If so, under the lead of Shelly and Nathan the villagers should be able to protect their village.

“Raynard!” She shouted, while just having backed off due to an attack from the priest.

Raynard looked up, heavily panting, but not being able to see the princess through the dead bodies piling up against the force field.

“Stop chanting!” Aurelia shouted again.

At first Raynard frowned at her order but then he decided he trusted her enough with that decision to follow it blindly. She was a princess after all.

Raynard stopped the spell and the barrier disappeared, letting the tower of monsters collapse or rather spill through the gate.

Raynard used that short moment to hastily jump back without falling over, and leaning on one knee, taking on a defensive stance. Reaching behind his back he drew out a sheathed sword, which he then hit the ground with. The sheath unfolded itself into a shield big enough to cover his rather large body. He drew the sword from his shield and while casting a protective spell at it, he used the sword to mow down the passing monsters.

Or at least that was what he hoped would happen.

He only managed to chop off a limb here and there but most monsters just passed through the gate more or less unharmed.

“Hahah, yes, you finally realized, that there’s no use in resisting, huh?” The priest interrupted his attacks to marvel at the doings of his own creations.

Aurelia predicted as much and used that short moment of carelessness, to dash past the priest and drive her fist into the remaining monsters near the entrance, catapulting their crushed remains into the forest.

“Hahah, take that, suckers!”

Needless to say, she was beyond thrilled to finally have landed a hit against her enemy. Satisfaction spreading on her face she looked to her feet where she simply expected pieces of torn flesh and limbs to lay around.

“Princess ...” Raynard muttered, and in that moment they both realized. The torn body parts were still moving, slowly inching towards each other, to form a completely new monster. The newly-formed was hardly recognizable as human. The head was somewhere on its side, and instead of two arms and legs, it had three arms and only one leg. It seems the body parts just randomly got attached to each other.

“What is this?” The princess exclaimed less shocked, more disgusted and angry.

“Wow, the spell really exceeded my expectations ...” the pastor muttered seemingly to himself.

The monstrosity proceeded to clumsily run after its more handsome peers.

Raynard either didn’t bother to attack this seemingly immortal being, or was too shocked to do anything.

Aurelia ran after it, leaving the tunnel, but coming to a halt when the monster disappeared through the bushes. Raynard followed shortly after.

“Hahaha, well, you seem to have realized that attacking my creations won’t bring the desired result.”

The pastor slowly walked through the gate and after speaking those ancient words closed it behind him.

“But still, I won’t let you run away like that,” he spoke, his face taking on a rather displeased expression.

“Screw you!” Aurelia spat, and took off in the opposite direction only for her path to be blocked. She didn’t even have the time to put her surprise into words. The priest had appeared before her and drove his fist into her stomach, throwing her towards the gate.

Raynard wanted to call out to her, but at the same time he didn’t want to draw attention to himself. This priest was truly terrifying. He only looked at his friend hunching with pain on the ground.

He thought about casting a healing spell, or at least a painkiller on her, but he was too far away, and he barely had any magic left.

“I have to admit, you are quite strong,” the priest spoke and thus gave Raynard more time to consider his next step. “But when all you can do is basic elemental spells, you won’t get too far.”

The priest slowly approached Aurelia who still lay on the floor, only changing into a seated position, when he was just a few feet away.

“I know your family,” he suddenly said, as if that statement alone was supposed to have any significance to her. “I bet your dad is the reason you were trained this way. Why else would a girl bulk up like that.”

“Hahah!” Aurelia only responded with mocking laughter. “You know my family? Sure doesn’t seem like it.”

The priest seemingly irritated stopped in his tracks.

“Look, I know exactly, what this is. You’re trying to drag me down, assuming I am in this situation, because of decisions my family made for me. You’re trying to talk me into believing I’m not a good fighter, because I lack the passion for what I am doing.”

She slowly rose up, clutching her aching stomach.

“You’re not the first one trying to do that. People always assume things about me just because I’m a princess, and nearly all the time they are dead wrong about it.”

The priest narrowed his eyes, because she was right and he was wrong. And he did not like being wrong.

The princess took her hand off her stomach and again took on a fighting stance.

“And guess what!” She scoffed. “That punch did barely hurt any more than the stomach pains I experience once a month!”

Now she was all fired up.

“Then show me what true pain is like if you think you’re so tough!” He shouted and spread his arms in an inviting gesture.

That was the moment they’ve waited for.

Aurelia leapt forward moving her arm for a punch.

The priest wasn’t dumb enough to let himself get punched that easily. However ...

“Huh?”

... he did not expect to encounter resistance, while trying to dodge the punch.

When he looked down, he realized his legs were encased in the same protection spell Raynard had used to prevent the undead from breaking out.

He tried dissolving the spell, but realized that its structure was far more complicated than most spells the princess had used.

So he’s the brain and she’s the muscle, he realized. They just weren’t really working together until now.

It quite literally hit him that maybe she was right, when she said his punch wasn’t painful at all.

Chapter 26 – Yes I’m setting the forest on fire

“Nathan.”

I heard someone calling out to me.

Himiko?

That didn’t make any sense.

She wouldn’t be here.

It must be a dream.

Still, I could clearly see her face in front of me. Her short black hair, that was cut down to bangs.

It was like one of those dreams where you knew it was a dream, but just brushed it off, because the dream was so far better than your reality.

Reality ...

“Nathan.”

Again the voice called out, and I realized who it belonged to.

“Raven.”

I had opened my eyes and came to face with my weirdo Incubus servant.

I wanted to puke, fall into a coma and smash my head into a wall because it hurt so much at the same time.

Wow, what the fuck.

“What happened?” I asked him, because what else should I do.

“Well, Shelly told me you came crashing down into the town square while they were discussing their strategy to defend the town.”

Oh right.

All at once my drowsiness faded and I was fully awake.

“Shit, what happened after that, where are they?”

“The villagers capable of fighting and magic have headed out with Shelly and Misha towards the gate to apprehend the priest, it seems. Everyone else is hiding below the town in the labyrinth systems.”

“Oh god, how long have I been out?”, I asked.

“Not that long, maybe two or three hours?”

“Hours?!” I jolted upward and looked for a window. I didn’t really notice before, but for some reason we were in our room inside the inn. I looked outside the window and indeed it was dark outside, the room only illuminated by a lamp somewhere.

“We need to help them!” I exclaimed and threw the blanket I was under off of me. A dull pain in my right arm made me flinch.

My arm was wrapped in a fresh bandage, but this time something was different: It was actually encased in some sort of hardened material.

Wait ...

“Is that a cast?” I asked with a bewildered expression.

“Oh yeah, when you crashed you seemed to have broken your arm. Luckily this town seemed to have a fairly competent medic. Also, I’m not sure if you noticed, but...”, Raven, who by the way was sitting on the opposite end of my bed, reached out and touched my carotid artery. The moment he did, an uncomfortable sensation crept through my entire body. The spot was sore as

heck, and I felt the urge to scratch it open like a victim of Hinamizawa syndrome. Though I was pretty convinced there weren't any maggots or the like crawling under my skin.

Raven continued his explanation.

"... you lost a lot of blood on the way here, so I had to give you a blood transfusion. If that bastard of a priest crosses my path, I'll rip his guts open and slowly let him bleed out."

That wasn't an image I necessarily wanted to have in my mind now, but there was something more important I needed to ask.

"First of all, absolutely pro revenge here, but wait, you gave me a blood transfusion?"

"Yeah, I am an incubus after all. Just a bite and I can give anyone who needs it my blood. I have too much of it after all."

Okay, so that's just a thing incubi do.

"That's interesting", I tried not to hang to long on the image of him sucking my neck, "but you should know, it wasn't really that pastor's fault. I used up to much mana, trying to get to the village in time."

"Master Nathan! If that's the case, that was really reckless!" Raven complained, sounding like some butler named Alfred or something.

I wondered for a second how long it took for me to reach the village. My memory of the past hours has become rather blurry.

Speaking of which ...

I softly clapped my cheeks with both hands and remained in that position.

"Oh wow, my fever seems to have disappeared. That's incredible, Raven, was that because of your blood?"

Raven who was still pouting after his last statement suddenly averted his gaze.

That ... was odd.

"Raven? Are you good?"

"No", was his faint answer.

For a second I reminded myself, that I could probably just give him an order to tell me the truth. But that was unethical. I didn't like playing that dirty. Especially on people close to me.

"Look Raven, I don't know what the matter is, but I'm pretty sure I'm making you feel bad right now so ... am I right?"

He sighed and just opened his mouth, searching for the right words.

"You have had a fever over the past few days."

I simply gave him an affirmative nod and he looked me in the eye.

"Well, I didn't know about that. I am not mad at you, it's more that I am mad at myself for not having noticed it."

He averted his gaze again, his face showing bitterness.

"It's not you fault", I tried comforting him, because that seemed to be the obvious thing to do.

"It is! You know, how fast I healed you, if I had noticed, I could have helped you."

"Look, I've kept it from the others, that I am sick, because I am not good at magic, and being sick, I was even more useless."

"What, but you are amazing!" He inched uncomfortably close, as he said that.

"Of course I am ...", I muttered, awkwardly looking on the floor. Because of course he would only think the best of me, even though I am total trash.

The conversation still demanded something to be said, but none of us seemed to be sure, what exactly it was, so I looked for another topic to change to.

“Ah, right”, I exclaimed when my gaze fell onto the grimoire, I for some reason shared a bed with.

Ahh, yes my darling Grimoire-tan have you rested well~?

[Ara, ara, master. Your maid didn't expect you to be a big spoon ♡(^, 6, ✿)]

Oh wow, have you devolved into an A-Type Onee-san? Or possibly a C-Type?

[Why don't you spread my pages and find out?]

Yikes, please god no, we agreed to keep this story PG-13 with the occasional dick joke thrown in for good measure. Also a 14-year old having sex with a book would be the most pathetic thing ever. Anyway, what is my current status?

[Your MP have been completely filled up.]

[Also you have leveled up.]

[Level: >>3<<]

[HP: >>335<<]

[MP: >>110<<]

[Your ability to take damage has been severely enhanced.]

[I assume this is due to the incubus's blood transfusion.]

That ... is amazing. I have no idea what to do with any of this, but still, I am impressed.

I had all these numbers, but without having any actual comparison to other people I couldn't really tell, if my stats were incredibly low, or maybe just average.

Anyway ...

Do you know, where Raynard and Aurelia are?

After all, I couldn't just leave them out there fighting for their lives.

[This inquiry- search complete.]

The grimoire interrupted itself.

[Raynard and Aurelia are in the forest.]

The grimoire showed me the mental image of a map of the forest, though honestly everything looked the same, so I still have no idea where they were.

However ...

“Since they aren't at the gate anymore, does that mean they have actually managed to defeat the pastor ...?”

[I cannot find the pastor.]

“What, what does this mean?”

[I use magic signatures for my search.]

[If I am unable to find a certain magic signature, it could mean the searched person is dead, unconscious, or has used up all their mana.]

All of those options seemed rather unlikely, the more I thought about it.

I rapidly got up and tried ignoring the sudden headache and vision loss due to iron deficiency, as to not worry Raven.

“Master Nathan?”, he obviously asked.

I walked around the room looking for my clothes, that were just lying around. Well considering I was on the verge of dying due to blood loss, sorting my clothing was the least concern, when I was brought up here. I would have stored them in the grimoire, just saying.

“We have to help the others”, I said while picking up a shirt. Raven was looking the other way, but clearly still stealing a few glances. I was naked, but that didn’t bother me.

...

Maybe I was an exhibitionist after all.

I thought there was no use of him turning away, if he was still looking. Also, wasn’t he flirting with me before we headed out of town?

I figured that his flustered behavior must have just been for show. And honestly it kinda worked, he looked cute blushing like that.

“Master, I have to remind you that you shouldn’t seek battle in your condition.”

I moved a bit to be able to meet his gaze. I hated not being able to look a person in the face, when talking to them, and also I wanted to tease him a little.

I wanted to disagree with him, but then I realized, he was right actually. I had a now broken arm, and after my last encounter with the priest I have used up all my mana and half my blood running away.

So I proposed the next logical idea.

“Then you fight in my stead.”

“What?”

“You’ll fly us through the forest and help the villagers out while protecting me.”

“Do you want me to fight for you?”

“Erm, yes?”

His fake uncomfortable expression gave away to a smile, and he suddenly moved forward, leaning on his arms.

His excited squeals were equivalent to a keyboard smash and I halted in the middle of putting on my shirt.

“Raven, are you good?”

“YES I AM FINALLY USEFUL FOR MASTER.”

His excitement elicited a chuckle from me.

“Alright then, time to go”, I said, after having changed and put the grimoire in my rucksack.

Raven stood up, and hugged me from behind, before leaving the room through the window.

We dove down for a short second, while Raven spread his wings and after a spectacular dive soared high above the buildings in this village.

We flew over a couple of villagers that were stationed at the edge of the forest as guards and I waved at them, as they nearly flew on their butts in surprise.

This time the forest was even darker, than when I left it, and I had to rely on my grimoire to navigate. I confirmed the locations of several villagers, before telling Raven where to fly to. I decided it was best to first meet up with Misha and Shelly as they kinda were the leaders of this whole operation.

Luckily the grimoire was able to track their position, so I could find them without a problem.

After a while I was at their position, according to the grimoire, but the forest was so thick I couldn’t actually see them from above.

I ordered Raven to just blindly land somewhere near.

We sort of just fell for a couple of seconds, somehow avoiding thicker branches. Raven seemed to shield me from getting any scratches, but I could clearly hear the rustling leaves attacking him.

Shortly before landing he spread his wings to create an upwind, preventing a hard collision and making it seem more like a feather gently gliding towards the ground.

The wind he caused made every leaf and grass stalk churn, while also directing the attention of our targets towards us. As well as a few unwelcome guests.

“Nathan?”, the older woman shouted when she realized who had joined them.

She had drawn her sword and I realized that was probably the first time I had seen her engage in actual combat.

“What are you doing here?!” Shelly asked, turning the back to the Zombies that were steadily getting closer to her and Misha. The latter only gave me a quick side glance, but kept her full attention towards the enemy.

“I came to help”, I answered, though I wasn’t quite sure what that help would entail. But I thought it would be best, if I simply asked her for a quick status report. “So, how’s the situation?”

“Raven, didn’t I tell you, to keep him away from the fights?”

Great, not only was she ignoring my question, but now she was also shitting on Raven.

“Shelly, look out!” Misha warned her, and with a swift motion, Shelly cut off the attacking zombies head. I wasn’t quite sure whether she just randomly lashed out or whether that was her talent speaking.

“I’m sorry, Miss, but Nathan gave me orders, and he is rather hard to resist.”

“I’m really sorry Shelly, but I don’t need you babysitting. Anyway, do you need any help or ...” My voice slowly trailed off, as I noticed a shadow slowly rising up behind her.

What the fuck?

I just stared at the headless, tattered corpse of the zombie Shelly had just chopped the head off of climbing onto its feet, my eyes just growing bigger and bigger, unsure what to make of this.

Shelly of course noticed my stares, and while she at first was waiting for me to finish my sentence, she realized what was going on. She lunged forward, spinning at the same time, and smashing her sword at the corpse like a baseball bat.

“Those bastards just keep coming back!”

She was indeed just lashing out in frustration.

“Wait what?” I took a moment to fully process what she just said. “They keep coming back?!” Well they are zombies so it kind of makes sense they are coming back, but ...

“Yeah, even if you smash them to tiny pieces they just merge into another monster altogether!” Misha confirmed.

Wow, that’s just way to OP.

Shit, what are we supposed to do?

“Have you any idea, how to permanently kill them?” I asked tentatively.

“No”, Shelly replied.

“We tried, brute force, magic, everything!”, Misha replied.

“Does your magic thingy maybe have an idea how to kill them?”

“Your magic thingy?”

Misha of course didn’t know, what we were talking about.

But Shelly was right, and for a second I felt stupid I didn’t have this idea myself, but of course I immediately asked the grimoire for help.

Do you know how to defeat these zombie thingies?

[This appears to be an unknown species.]

[I'd need to analyze them to give you a list of viable strategies.]

What does analyze mean? How do I do that?

[You simply need to establish contact between me and a specimen.]

Contact? Do I have to touch those things?

[You don't have to.]

[Only I have to touch them.]

“Okay, listen up, I need to get close to one of these bitches, close enough to be able to touch them.”

“Eek, you want to touch these monsters?” Misha exclaimed.

“Not exactly...”

“Here, take this!”

“Huh?”

This eager offering came from behind me. Raven was standing there, his wings spread, offering me a zombie head like an apple.

Does this work for you?

[Yes, this should suffice.]

“Well, thank you I guess. Just please don't bring any of those into my house as a present, like a cat.”

Thankfully Raven took this statement with humor.

“Everything for my master.”

“Alright ...”

I took the grimoire out of my bag, and slowly approached the zombie head. Honestly it didn't really feel disgusting. I guess, this situation felt too surreal for me to register as messed up.

I could see slight movement coming from the jaws, that were held shut by Raven.

And then I established the contact.

I don't know, what exactly I expected to happen, probably some cool loading sound effect, or the information being sent to the grimoire neatly visualized. But mostly, it was just me and Raven with outstretched arms, letting the objects on our hands touch each other.

It was almost like The Creation of Adam.

I wanna wanna touch your ...

[Body, body, body, body, body, body!]

Wait, why do you know that song?

[I have access to your memories.]

[Dare I say, you have interesting tastes.]

I feel like you already know this, but interesting doesn't really sound accepting ...

[Data collected.]

Way to change topics ...

[It appears that burning the >>Zombies<< is the most effective strategy.]

“Fire ...”, I muttered. “Of course, if they don't have a body, they can't reform!” I turned around leaving Raven and his head alone. Shelly and Misha have been crushing the same zombie over and over again, it seemed. Oops, guess I was a bit preoccupied.

Anyway ...

“Misha”, I called out, “haven't you tried using a fire spell to burn the monsters down?”

“A fire spell? No, we’re in a forest in a middle of summer. Do you know how easily that could cause a forest fire?”

Why is everyone always doubting what I say.

“Look, either we have a forest fire, we can actually put out, or we are overrun by those undying zombies, alright?”

Misha just looked at me in bewilderment, while that zombie was bracing for its eleventy-seventh time.

Fuck it.

“Firebolt!” I shouted, shooting off a spell, I had just downloaded from the grimoire on a whim.

The zombies chest exploded and it went down with a horrific gurgle, it’s corpse slowly burning on the ground, casually setting a bit of nearby grass on fire.

We waited a couple of seconds, but it did not move.

“There you go”, I said, content with my work.

“It worked ...”, Shelly responded in bewilderment, while the corpse laid on the ground slowly burning away.

“Do you know, where the other villagers are?” I asked the both of them.

“We told them to spread out, but stay close to the edge of the forest”, Shelly responded.

“Can you get a hold of them and tell them to leave the forest?”

“If we split it shouldn’t take to long, but why?”

“I am going to set this forest on fire.”

Chapter 27 – And the rain, rain, rain came down, down, down

Aurelia and Raynard were moving through the forest.

While Raynard was carrying the unconscious pastor, Aurelia was fighting against the monsters. Though she gave up seriously fighting a long time ago. It didn't take her too long to figure out it wouldn't make much of a difference if she took them on with full force. In fact, it would only slow them down and also cost her lots of mana and stamina. So she resorted to just kicking them out of the way, while slowly moving towards where she hoped the village was.

Sadly, her memory of the forest wasn't as good, as say Misha's who took on the forest on a daily basis. Also, Nathan wasn't with them. She hoped he was able warn the villagers.

"Is everything alright?" She asked Raynard behind her.

"Yeah, but I keep wondering, why are the zombies still this deep into the forest. Weren't they headed for the village?"

Aurelia hadn't considered this, but now that she thought about it, it made sense. "Maybe they got lost or something, because the priest got knocked out?"

"Well, that would optimal..."

After they had moved on for a short while, he added, "Hey, do you smell that?"

Aurelia, now breathing heavily, halted to take an intentional breath for a second, which was hard without choking.

"Hah, oh my ...", she brought out in between breaths. Her brows moved to form a frown and she took a step back trying to look though the treetops blocking out the light.

At least that is how it should have been.

Instead the sky turned orange with dark clouds in between.

"Oh great", she muttered looking at the smoke rising from what was without a doubt the burning forest below it.

She stood still for a moment, not quite sure what to do in this situation, which only spoke for her exhaustion, until her listlessness was interrupted by a sudden gust of wind coming from in front of them.

A pack of tempest wolves sped past them, completely ignoring them in spite of their usually aggressive behavior.

Aurelia shielded herself from the debris they brought with them in their haste. As soon as the wind calmed down, "We need to go!" She said and moved back to where they came.

"What, where to?" Raynard was obviously confused but complied nonetheless.

"The gate. I think our best chances at outrunning the fire would be to hide inside the emergency exit."

"Oh, alright. You know, we don't have a way of opening the gate?"

"We have him", she answered and vaguely motioned towards the unconscious priest. With that the conversation was over.

Why now of all times, she thought to herself.

God I just hope Nathan is safe.

Little did she know, Nathan was the cause of the fire.

I exhaled one last time and looked at my work below.

Using a firebreath spell and Raven's flight I set the forest on fire from above.

The spell was using up lots of mana every second it was in use, so I had Raven giving me blood transfusions the entire time via biting me, so I didn't faint like ... just a couple of hours ago.

No I don't learn from my mistakes.

At least not as long as I find some loophole.

Starting from the River at the edge of the forest I flew across the forest in one straight line and setting on fire everything below me. I probably only was able to burn down one percent of it all and decided to let nature and physics do the rest.

That should hold the zombies at bay.

Of course we made sure the citizens were all evacuated, thanks to the grimoire it was only a matter of minutes. The townspeople had also gathered at the forest's edge to contain the fire in case it would reach the village, which it definitely would.

"Okay, that should do it", I said, and Raven stopped biting my neck. A few droplets of blood escaped from the bite marks that I quickly covered up with my hand. I would have to deal with it later. Unfortunately my little itty-bitty was the least of our problems.

"Should I fly back to the village?" Raven asked me, now hovering on the spot with me in his arms.

"No, we should look for Raynard and Aurelia."

"Oh, right."

The grimoire still wasn't picking up on the pastor's mana signature, however it was monitoring Aurelia's and Raynard's, so I had an idea where they were. Just a few minutes prior the grimoire has notified me, that Aurelia's mana level was below 20 percent so I started to get worried. I of course immediately checked their position. Sadly, I wasn't very good at spotting differences between trees, but what I did notice that they weren't at the gate.

So I figured, or rather hoped, they managed to fight back against the priest and leave for the village.

Hopefully they had reached the village by now. The grimoire hovered below me as I tried to figure out their position from the very rudimentary map.

Wait ...

They were back at the clearing.

"Why-"

And then it struck me.

"Holy crap, I actually forgot to tell them about my plan!"

"Master, please don't move that much, I- I'm having trouble holding you!"

"Raven, I forgot to actually tell them that I wanted to burn down the forest, and now they're stuck, because they didn't return to the village!"

"If that would cheer you up, I'd like to point out, that if we had waited for them to return, the zombies would have reached the village by now."

"Well, that's true, but ... anyway, Raven, just fly that direction until you see a clearing with a weird stone structure in the middle. That's where they should be", I said, as I pointed where I hoped my friends were.

"Very well", he replied, and leaned a bit to the side, to adjust his angle.

I again looked at my work below, the fire gradually eating its way into the forest.

I dramatically sighed at this look. I kinda felt at peace.

And then I started coughing, my chest heavily convulsing.

“Raven”, I hissed through my scratching throat.

He has flown us straight through a cloud of smoke, in which I obviously couldn’t breathe very well.

Luckily we traversed it within a couple of seconds and the entire rest of the way down, I spent coughing out dead trees.

We landed near the gate, I think. I wasn’t quite sure at the moment, because my eyes very watery and I just couldn’t stop coughing. I immediately freed myself from Raven’s embrace, because quite frankly I felt like I was asphyxiating.

“Raven, you should know, that between different species there is different standards for how they breathe ...” I somehow managed to get out, though I realized my sentence probably made zero sense.

“Nathan? Oh my, are you alright?” I heard Aurelia shout from somewhere.

“Yeah, fine just ... whatever”, I replied just as I stood up.

“A fire has broken out”, Raynard who was just approaching us said.

Oh.

I noted the unconscious pastor on his shoulders and moved on, because there were more important matters to discuss.

“Ah, yeah about that”, I responded, “that actually was my doing.”

“Huh?”

Aurelia responded with the most dumbfounded expression I’ve seen from her thus far. And she had been rarely on board with my bullshit from the beginning.

“Okay, so it turns out those zombies’ weakness is fire, you can get rid of them by burning them, and so I figured setting the entire forest on fire would be the easiest way to kill them all.”

“Wha- Why would you set the forest on fire?” Aurelia wasn’t even particularly angry anymore, maybe a bit in despair.

“I don’t know, I thought it would be the easiest way to get them all! And also I might have forgotten about you two ...” I sheepishly admitted after finishing my quick explanation. “But that’s why I’m here now”, I quickly added.

“Wow, great thinking”, Aurelia replied deadpan. Raynard just idly stood by.

“Anyway, do have another great plan?” Aurelia asked.

“I was thinking Raven could fly us all out of the forest ...”

“Yeah, there’s too many people. I’d have to fly at least twice”, he responded.

“And by then the fire might have reached us”, Raynard completed the train of thought.

“We were hoping to get through the underground passage using the priest”, Aurelia said.

“I’m not sure this is the safest way to get out of this situation ...”, I objected.

“Well then, what do you want to do?” I could hear she was desperately trying to stay calm.

“Wha- why me?” I questioned. “Aren’t you like ... a princess and stuff, shouldn’t you lead?”

“Being a princess doesn’t have to do anything with this. You are the one in possession of, I don’t even know, some almighty weapon, I was hoping it would help us out!”

“Okay, well, what do you say?!” I asked the grimoire out loud, even though I was the only one hearing it. Or whatever **[that]** qualified as.

[It would appear the most effective way to solve the problem would be to douse the fire.]

“That sounds reasonable”, I commented.

“Care to enlighten us?” Aurelia asked.

“Sorry, I forgot.”

I really need to get used to forward the grimoire’s messages to the others. Or can’t I just establish a connection between them and the grimoire? Well that’s a problem for later.

“So, how much water-” That was all I managed to say when I realized a couple droplets on my head.

“Never mind.”

I looked up towards the sky, and despite there not being a single cloud the droplets became more and more. When Raynard became soaked in a matter of seconds he shuddered giving off a weird high-pitched sound. Aurelia meanwhile just held her face towards the pouring water, as if wanting to wash the grime of battle off of her.

Steam rose up from around us, and now we were getting wet from all sides, as the rain fell down on us, while the vapor crawled along our bodies from below.

It would probably take a bit for the fire to be extinguished but to us this rain was a sign of the battle coming to an end.

Chapter 28 – Observation

To say the village of Blackwood had overcome the night without any major losses would be an understatement.

Surprisingly, all of the villagers have survived the night, though many have sustained injury from either the attack, or the fire. Some of the villagers have inhaled quite the bit of smoke however, and the next few hours would prove crucial.

The buildings closest to the forest, mainly the church and the inn had sustained damages that would not allow the villagers to take on their usual MO for quite some time. As most of the capable village-people were out in the forest when it was set on fire, no one really was able to stop it from reaching the buildings. Then again any attempt to put out the fire single-handedly most likely would have proven futile.

Those were the kinds of thoughts Sasha had as she watched the events of the night unfold through a crystal ball. It hurt Sasha to see her former home like that, but sacrifices had to be made and their little experiment proved to be successful. A tinge of pride mixed with relief hit her as she watched her little sister take the initiative and guide the villagers to using a rain spell to put out the fire. In the end, she really hadn't needed to worry about leaving her on her own.

“So, what you say, Rudolph??” She asked the person opposite.

“I guess we can let that pass. Though, honestly we should probably dispose of the pastor in some way, not that he would be of any more use from now on.”

“Agreed, so we can report this as successful?”

“That is not our decision to make.”

“Well, we couldn't have possibly guessed that there would be a grimoire user involved.”

“A blessing in disguise, really ...”

“What makes you say so?”

“If Ebony hadn't messed up seizing the grimoire back then, most likely we wouldn't have any witnesses left to report the whole ordeal.”

“What about it? We're not the first ones to try our hands at necromancy.”

“Yes, but this might well be the most successful recorded attempt. This could end up becoming a matter at national level.”

“You are at national level too, you'd be able to do something about that, right?”

“Sasha, you really have no idea what politics is about.”

“What, I am just some country bumpkin after all.”

“A country bumpkin that ended up being too powerful to not join our ranks”, the way Rudolph said this had a certain sting to it.

“Hahah, how flattering!”

Sasha knew that Rudolph had whatever suspicions about her. Maybe it was because she was new, maybe because she has gathered astounding power over the past 3 years that she has been studying magic, or maybe because her motives were rather elusive.

Rudolph on the other hand had everything that you needed to either be an upstanding citizen, or a crooked savant. At least that is the impression she got from him, without having known him that much. Except for their “business meetings” as she liked to call them, they barely exchanged any words. Although, from rumors she knew that studying magic is only a side dish to his big serving of revenge that he craved.

“Well”, Sasha said, ripping herself out of her own thoughts, “what else can we do other than report? It was only a test run after all, and even if you consider being unable to wipe out the entire village a failure, what we were really after was how an undead army would perform.”

“Exactly.”

“Not everyday you get that kind of magic field test, hahah.” Sasha let a grin slip, thinking back to what she had witnessed over these past few hours.

“Then hopefully we will soon be able to move on to the next stage”, Rudolph said in a rather cold manner, and lifted himself from his seat.

“Are you coming with me?” He asked her, though at first she didn’t respond, only eyeing her younger sister.

“I have a younger sibling as well.”

“So I’ve heard.”

“I love him with all I have.”

“So do I.”

“And I like being able to show him that.”

“...”

“Which is why I don’t understand how you could be so cruel to your sister.”

“It is because I love her that I wouldn’t want her to know what I am doing.”

“... My brother would hate me if he knew.”

“See?”

“You shouldn’t overuse Alabaster like that, it might arise suspicion.”

“I’ll call him back. She will most likely think that he got lost in the fire.”

“Of course.”

Sasha spent the next couple minutes looking through the crystal ball, getting a few final glances of her sister.

Chapter 29 – The morning after

Air left my puffed cheeks. One might have called it a sigh of exhaustion and one may have been right.

I was leaning against the wall of some building in the village center. My eyes kept falling shut, but impressions from all over the place made me open them up reflexively.

Some bag brushed my thigh as it was placed next to me. I looked up and saw a princess that made me question if I looked even worse than her.

“All packed up?” She asked me.

“Not like I have a lot of belongings”, I answered.

Raynard and Shelly also came into my field of view.

“The carriage is still going to take a bit of preparation”, said Shelly, her voice unusually quiet.

I just looked straight ahead, and head Raynard join me on the ground.

Aurelia looked between the two of us and Shelly and proposed: “Want to take a morning walk?”

The sun had already risen and it was unusually quiet, considering this being a village and all. Most people tried to get sleep, if the events of the night even allowed them to.

I didn't really know where to go with my eyes, as the scenery almost gave me whiplash. A forest in ashes to the right, tidy little houses to the left. The forest would be full of carcasses to remove and I hoped it wouldn't be any of the villagers that were still alive the day before, but of course I wouldn't be able to tell.

The goody two-shoes within me wanted to somehow help clean this mess, after all it was partly my fault. In reality though I was all too happy to just take the carriage back to Ataraxia. Which seemed a million miles away to me at the moment.

“So, any idea what ever happened last night?” Aurelia said in a hushed tone, almost as if not to wake anyone. If I wasn't standing next to her I might have not heard.

“Only thing I am certain of is that this is gonna be one heck of a report”, Shelly answered.

These two seemed to be the only two capable of holding a conversation at this point. Though Raynard seemed very interested in hearing what Shelly had to say.

“The only thing I can confidently say about what happened last night is that this probably was the most successful attempt at necromancy in recorded history.”

Due to everyone being awfully tired I wasn't really able to interpret the other's reaction. I barely had one myself but that was mostly because I had no idea what to make of necromancy in this world. Since my arrival, which mind you has only been around two weeks ago, I have seen so many out of this world (my world) things that I am so over-saturated, that I am just hardly impressed when anything impressive happens.

“Necromancy is definitely not my field of expertise though, and I suppose you kids aren't any smarter either.”

“We are just about to become third-graders, so no”, was Aurelia's answer. “What about the pastor?” She promptly changed topics.

“I have him restrained, so he shouldn't be a problem. You did quite the number on him though, wouldn't wake up, no matter what. Let's hope he wakes up until we arrive in Ataraxia, because questioning might become a problem.”

“What about Misha?”

“Poor girl doesn’t know anything of course, she only knows some rogue magic spells, which by the way, I could also get her arrested for, if we were in the city.”

“That’s not quite what I meant”, Aurelia answered with a weird mix of emotions, somewhere between weirded out and surprised. “I meant how she was doing.”

“Oh! Well-” Shelly suddenly stopped in her tracks. “I think you can ask her that yourself.”

Misha suddenly appeared in front of us. It would have been anyone’s reflex to ask her how she found us, but considering we are the only people walking a village with barely a couple dozen houses, that would have been a dumb question.

“My mom and I are thinking of leaving the village.”

Oh.

None of us said anything but honestly thinking about it what was there to say.

“That’s ... understandable”, Aurelia replied rather bluntly.

“Have you made any proper plans?” Raynard asked. “Just leaving your home like that after living there most your life is a ... pretty big thing.”

“We’re not sure. Most likely to the city. My mother could make a living as a cook, and I maybe I could do something with my magic. Though, as Shelly told me, considering I haven’t been schooled, I might get into trouble instantly.”

“Why not just apply for magic school?” I asked out of curiosity. I mean, if a weird case like me could spontaneously apply for third year despite not having been taught any proper magic, what could possibly stop Misha? “You’ve been doing this for a while, you’re better at magic than me, you should be fine, shouldn’t you?”

“That’s because all our money is whatever that house was worth”, Misha answered pointing towards the inn behind us.

“Most magic schools in the cities require tuition fees”, Shelly explained to me.

That just made to much sense.

Wait, what about Ataraxia?

I wanted to ask, but I figured it wasn’t the time.

“Well, if you ever have the time or need, make sure to visit us in Ataraxia”, Aurelia offered.

“Thanks, I’ll ... keep that in mind”, Misha said, though it sounded rather unsure.

Well, imagine a country bumpkin being invited by a princess to her castle.

“Anyway, I just wanted to say thank you and good bye. I need to figure out how I can help my people and what will happen next.”

“You’ll manage”, I tried offering some words of comfort, but honestly I don’t know how it came out.

“I will.”

They seemed to have had some effect.

“Until then”, Misha said with a wave, disappearing behind another house, almost as if she was walking out of the frame in a movie.

The four of us stood in a row next to each other, not quite sure what to do with ourselves.

Slowly the village people decided to have their late awakening. And as the hustle and bustle got louder with people thanking us, some through decent acknowledgment, others more enthusiastic, slowly the rattling of a cart mixed into all of it.

“WHAT KIND OF A FUNERAL PARTY IS GOING ON WITH YOU FOUR!”

“Good to see you too old hag”, I replied not expecting her to hear it. Whether she did, or for once decided to not respond I do not know.

“I have already loaded in all your luggage”, Raven, who was here also, said.

“Thanks man, we appreciate it, really”, Raynard said, and was the first to get onto the cart. Surprisingly we would have a rather relaxed ride back home.